

YOU ARE HEREBY CALLED: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF MORMON
MISSIONARIES

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide an initial examination into Mormon missionaries from an anthropological, and ethnographic, perspective. Through the use of autoethnography, I provide an emic understanding into this parallel culture inside mainstream Mormonism. Employing surveys and personal interviews with former Mormon missionaries, I seek to more fully develop the understanding of the formation of Mormon missionary identity, how Mormons see their missionary service as a life event, and the use of folklore by Mormon missionaries to adapt the Gospel message to new cultures.

The usual demographic indicators—age, sex, ethnicity, or occupation—had no correlation to Mormon missionary identity or how the mission experience is viewed as a life event. However, age was a correlative factor in what type of challenge—cultural or mission—was the most difficult for Mormon missionaries to overcome during their service; the older a returned missionary was the more likely they were to choose a cultural challenge as the most significant problem inside their missionary service.

The trainer/first companion is the most influential person in establishing a Mormon missionaries' identity and contributing to their cultural understanding. Contrary to my expectations about missionaries who serve in their native cultures, the mission president is not the most influential person in forming Mormon missionary identity. The least influential persons on the development of Mormon missionary identity were the district/zone leaders.

In regards to a life event, former Mormon missionaries did conceptualize their missionary experiences as self-contained time. While aspects of a rite of passage/rite of social intensification were present in the answers missionaries gave, the use of terms that denote the mission as being a completely separate place (bubble, missionary world, dream, different life, etc.) permeated my informant's responses.

Mormon missionaries do not use knowledge of folklore/folk culture to tailor their Gospel message to the cultures they serve in. However, missions that contain areas which are extremely rural or densely urban found missionaries trying new folklore approaches and adapting the message to the people around them suggesting that population density, not culture, drives the incorporation of folklore into missionaries' teaching techniques.

DEDICATION

To my Heavenly Father Who allowed me to serve His children as a full-time missionary in Hong Kong and Who has sustained me through the world of graduate school and the writing process. I lack the words to fully—or adequately—express my gratitude for the depth, frequency, and intimacy of blessings He has given me while I studied here at Texas A&M.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Joseph F. Smith, sixth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and nephew of Joseph Smith Jr., had a frightening experience on his way home from his mission to the Hawaiian Islands. Joining up with a wagon train in California heading east toward Utah, the expedition encountered some men who had a little too much to drink and were more than a little unfriendly towards Mormons. The following ensued:

[We were confronted by a] wagonload of profane drunks ... , shooting their guns, yelling wildly, and cursing the Mormons.” One of the drunks, “waving a pistol,” came toward [me]. [Although I] was terrified, [I] felt it would be unwise and useless to run ... , and so [I] advanced toward the gunman as if [I] found nothing out of the ordinary in his conduct. ‘Are you a [blankety blank blank] Mormon?’ the [gunman] demanded. Mustering all the composure [I] could, [I] answered evenly while looking the man straight in the eye, ‘Yes, siree; dyed in the wool; true blue, through and through.’ Almost stunned by this wholly unexpected response, the gunman stopped, dropped his hands to his sides, and, after looking incredulously at [me] for a moment, said in a subdued tone, ‘Well, you are the [blankety blank] pleasantest man I ever met! Shake. I am glad to see a fellow stand for his convictions.’ So saying, he turned and walked away (Ballard 2014).

I chose to open my dissertation with this autobiographical story because it illustrates one of the core concepts of being a Mormon missionary: the willingness to stand up, and stand out, for what you believe in. Beyond that, I too am a “dyed in the wool; true blue, through and through” member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Ibid.). And while I doubt that I am the most “[blankety blank] pleasantest man” you’ll ever meet, I often had to stand up for my convictions as former missionary for the LDS Church in Hong Kong.

At this point, the reader might wonder if this dissertation will be academic, or religious, in tone; rest assured, I have no other motive than to describe and analyze the important culture of Mormon missionaries from an objective, and anthropological, position. However, to understand Mormon missionaries, and their cultural composition, this dissertation will have to discuss Mormonism, its religious structures, and its doctrines from a faith-based viewpoint. I will assume that the reader takes any religious claims I make about Mormonism with a grain of salt and with an open mind; and, in turn, I am going to expect the reader to hold me to a standard of objectivity knowing full well my bias as practicing member of my faith.

Ethnography: The Shadowy Science?

Until I went to graduate school, I had never heard the word “ethnography.” Higher education is a world filled with words that are designed to hide what we researchers actually do. Since ethnography is one of those mysterious anthropological terms, I will provide a short definition. For the purpose of this dissertation, ethnography

is defined as the attempt to scientifically describe cultures, aspects of cultures, and cultural phenomenon. There are certainly more complex definitions of what constitutes ethnography from any number of anthropological heavyweights; however, I have found that the simplest definitions provide the greatest amount of clarity and the least amount of academic gobbledygook. A recent email I received can demonstrate how varied definitions for ethnography can be.

In October 2013, I got an email asking for ethnographic submissions for an academic conference. The committee, who were in charge of selecting suitable papers for presentation, included their own definition of ethnography. In part, they said, “ethnography is a method particularly suited for making the invisible visible. We seek to expose invisibility, shadows, obscurity, [and] the intangible/the imperceptible/the impalpable” (Walters n.d.). Is ethnography supposed to be a metaphysical exercise in uncovering the invisible and impalpable human cultural variety from the obscure shadows?

Personally, I reject that definition of ethnography. First, it sounds arrogant. It is correct that I have more strict training in anthropology than the average person on the street. But, formal education does not mean I am any more adept at ferreting out the nuances of culture than an amateur observer of humanity. Second, it attempts to gussy up what we do as anthropologists. Simply put, we have questions about peoples/cultures, we talk/watch/interact with people to answer those questions, and then we write about it. Therefore, in this text, ethnography is not about making the invisible visible; it is about making the unexperienced experience-able. Why? Each person has

only one lifetime, and a finite amount of time within that lifetime, to experience the rich depth of human cultural variation. I will never be a spray-painting social activist scrawling messages of change on a New York subway car (Silver 1983); or, a traditional Montana sheep rancher herding free-range flocks through the mountain peaks near my home (Castaing-Taylor 2009); or, a Scripps National Spelling Bee competitor dedicating years to the mastery of words hoping to win the champion's cup (Blitz 2002). You will probably never be a Mormon missionary, or any type of missionary for that matter. Thus, the point of this ethnography is to detail, as best as possible, the experience of being a Mormon missionary and the greater Mormon culture that surrounds missionary work inside the LDS Church. That is the way I think ethnography should be written; and, that line of thought will frame the entire narrative of this dissertation.

My Choice to Study Myself

My decision to perform an ethnographic study on Mormon missionaries came about for three major reasons. The first, if I am honest, is my wife and daughter. As I was preparing for my nine-month stint of research in China studying the development of Hong Kong People inside the greater Hong Kong consciousness, my wife informed me that we were expecting our first child after four years of eagerly anticipating an expansion to our family. Since my wife was the sole source of our family's income, I could not leave her alone with a new baby and a full-time job while I was cavorted off to China for the better part of a year. The birth of my daughter, Penelope Kate Pepper, forced me to reevaluate my research agendas and shift my focus away from my previous project. After conducting some initial research and finding nearly nothing—

anthropologically at least—about Mormonism, I decided that I would go with what I know. It has been a fascinating process analyzing my own “people”; deeper research into a culture I belong to has been fun, difficult, interesting, and challenging all at the same time.

The second reason is that I wanted to provide an opportunity to objectively correct cultural misinformation about Mormonism. I remember reading some basic textbooks about the anthropology of religion and coming across information about Mormons that was plainly incorrect. I excused these oversights and chalked them up to lazy research at worst or innocent mistakes at best. But, as I got to thinking about it, I grew more frustrated. Misinformation in a published book, with a fancy cover, appears credible because our culture recognizes that not every person’s opinion gets published by the Harvard University Press. During the course of my research, I cannot count how many times one of my informants expressed excitement about my project because it was a “Mormon writing about Mormons” and that I would “do it justice.” Despite being an international religious presence, Mormonism still suffers from a lot of misconceptions. Many LDS individuals were unwilling to talk to me because they did not know what my research would be used for (I told them it was for a dissertation) and they refused to be part of anything that could be used as an attack against the Church (even though I assured them that my research topic was harmless). After finding out I was a Mormon myself, people were much more willing to sit down and talk with me because they felt safe giving me what they considered as profoundly sacred information. One purpose, therefore, in writing this dissertation is to provide quality, first-hand information so that

the reader can sort out what Mormons are like for themselves. I am not trying to convince the reader of the truth of anything discussed in this book; but, I am going to talk about Mormonism as I have experienced it firsthand and as it was shared with me by my informants. I want the reader to have official Church doctrines and positions from a legitimate, educated source. As a scholar, I think that is only fair.

The final reason stems from a book I read in my first class as a graduate student. My professor assigned a book review as part of the class and I pulled *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* by George Marcus and Michael Fischer. In the introduction, they claim that the purposes of anthropology—the “salvaging [...] of distinct cultural forms of life” and the “cultural critique of ourselves”—have not been met (Fischer and Marcus 1999, 1).

Anthropologists had been somewhat successful in preserving different ways of life for future generations; but, they were focused generally on any ways of life outside of their own Western perspectives and societies. Marcus and Fischer were advocating, in some ways, that anthropology should be turned inward instead of always focusing outward. The studies of other people could demonstrate parallel beliefs, social structures, and ways of being inside our own culture that created a richer understanding of ourselves. I think this idea has value; I hope that this text will, through the study of Mormon missionaries, help bring us to a better understanding of what it means to be human.

The Project

This dissertation will address three basic questions about the Mormon missionary experience. The first question—who inside the mission experience is the most

influential in establishing Mormon missionary identity—seeks to look at how Mormon missionaries develop a missionary mindset. While Mormonism places high importance on missionary work, moving from a lay member to a full-time volunteer missionary requires a huge paradigm shift. Beyond that, many missionaries serve in foreign cultures forcing them to deal with the additional burden of culture shock on top of their adjustments to a new lifestyle as a missionary. I want to examine who, amid all these changes, helps missionaries transition from their secular identity to their spiritual identity.

Second, the Mormon mission experience is unlike any other part of a Mormon's life. It represents a time of total devotion to God. Every informant I sat down with indicated that they had come back for their missionary service as a completely new person. Inside Mormonism, the mission experience can signal an end to childhood and act as a transitional phase on the way to adulthood. Although the mission certainly has aspects of a rite of passage, will former Mormon missionaries categorize the experience solely in those terms? I am interested in investigating if returned Mormon missionaries see their missionary service as a rite of passage or if the experience is so complex that it transcends this classification.

Third, Mormon missionary work exists in cultural circumstances where local traditions might not fit well with Mormon theology. However, Mormon missionaries are not allowed to alter the doctrines of the Church—a process called “inculturation”—to conform to indigenous cultural practices or codes of morality. In the face of a

globalizing church, I want to assess if, or how, Mormon missionaries use folk lore/folk culture to adapt the message to the local contexts they face daily around the world.

Each of these questions deal with classic anthropological topics—identity, rites of passage, and folklore—and applies them to Mormon missionaries. Since the anthropological literature on Mormon missionaries is sparse, the justification for these research choices is straightforward. Any researcher, especially one who is looking to provide an ethnographic description of a new culture, would use these general topics as guidelines to orient their research agenda. Additionally, I think these issues help to further the understanding of Mormon missionaries while also paving the way for supplementary anthropological inquiry into Mormonism in the future. Aside from scholarly reasons, these topics (possibly because of my own service as a missionary) simply interested me the most.

In order to test these questions, I created an online survey that used snowball sampling to reach as many returned Mormon missionaries as possible. By the time the survey closed, I had 875 responses. These surveys were designed to provide the quantitative data I needed to empirically evaluate my hypotheses. To supplement that interpretation with qualitative data, I also conducted 82 face-to-face interviews. The interview population was returned Mormon missionaries who lived within the boundaries of the Texas College Station Stake. These interviews usually lasted an hour and gave me a chance to ask more in-depth questions about the Mormon missionary experience.

Literature Review

Missionary work has been a fundamental force in Mormonism since the earliest days of the Church's founding in 1831. That same missionary spirit exists today and "remains a central concern for the Mormon faithful" wherever they are (Whittaker 2000, 460). Missiology, a discipline concerned with "the critical reflection of the traditional Christian church's mission history", often excludes Mormonism because it does not fit within its field of inquiry (Ibid., 465). Aside from that concern, the complexity of the Mormon mission, as an anthropological subject, goes beyond what can be covered in this dissertation. A true ethnographic picture of the Mormon missionary would require much more; as David Whittaker (2000) suggests:

To study [the LDS mission program] is to study the history of the church itself, moving as it did from a few committed families in April 1830 to an international membership today of over [14] million. A full discussion of the missionary system would require a look at a variety of topics ranging from preparing to serve; receiving the formal missionary call (including preparing for and receiving the sacred temple ordinances); the conversion process in which the nonmember is converted (including such sociological topics as recruitment, acculturation, and socialization); the mission experience itself (including such topics as testimony, morale, the disciplined life of the missionary, missionary companionships, the mission rules, the quest for orthodoxy in thought, behavior, and literature); the

mission experience as a rite of passage into the larger Mormon world; and religious disaffection or apostasy (460).

This dissertation will not begin to broach these topics; however, it is important to recognize that any attempt to ethnographically discuss Mormon missionaries requires that some topics—which might be more interesting to the reader—simply go undiscussed.

However, to demonstrate that this text includes more than personal experiences, detailed interviews, or religious beliefs about Mormonism, review of the relevant anthropological literature is necessary. To start, we need to discuss the different ideological positions of anthropologists and missionaries. Missionary work and anthropology can be seen to have mutually exclusive, or even antagonistic, ends; or, as John Burton (2007) succinctly puts it, “[missionaries are] to be regarded as [the] official intellectual enemies of anthropologists” (209). Missionaries are tasked with sharing the tenets of their religion including many doctrines that are scientifically untestable or potentially culturally destructive. Anthropology, on the other hand, is concerned with the description of cultures using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to scientifically examine diversity among humanity while attempting to protect unique worldviews and cultural traits (Stipe 1980). Anthropologists can appear to preserve cultural practices missionaries view as damaging to spiritual growth, while missionaries seem bent on destroying any cultural structure that stands in the way of spreading their faith. Additionally, missionaries have been often cast as unwanted agents of culture

change or as propagators of an outdated system of belief by anthropologists (Ibid.). Despite what appears to be a rocky relationship, Sjaak van der Geest (1990), a missionary-turned-anthropologist, calls for the two camps to acknowledge that they are actually “brothers under the skin” with a shared purpose of documenting—albeit from different perspectives—the world’s distinctive cultures. There have even been recent calls for Christian missionaries to receive extensive anthropological training in preparation for their missionary service (Rooms 2012).

The discipline of anthropology, despite its rocky relationship with missionaries, has a long history of ethnographic research connected to missionaries. *The Life of A South African Tribe* (Junod 1962), *Do Kamo: Person and Myth in the Melanesian World* (Leenhardt 1947), *The Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain* (Duran 1964), and *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia* (Smith and Smith 1968) are prime examples of missionary-based ethnographic research. A more recent example of anthropological research conducted by missionaries—and a personal favorite—is *Behind Mud Walls* (Wiser, Wiser and Wadley 2000). Authored by two Presbyterian missionaries and anthropologists, William and Charlotte Wiser, this text demonstrates that two antagonistic identities—missionary and anthropologist—can work in tandem to produce quality ethnographic results (Ibid.).

As indicated previously, the study of the LDS Church’s missionary activities is a fruitful, yet underdeveloped, realm for any ethnographic study of Mormon missionaries. Tancred King (1983) made the first serious attempt to look at Mormon missions, in the vein of missiology, in a short article entitled “Missiology and Mormon Missions” but the

field has not progressed much since he first published over 30 years ago. The closest attempt to approach both Mormon missionaries and Mormon missiology from an ethnographic point of view might be Gary and Gordon Shepherd. Their book *Mormon Passage: A Missionary Chronicle* details their own missionary experiences in Mexico focusing on the areas they lived in while supplementing that historical/cultural understanding with their own personal experiences (Shepherd and Shepherd 1998). Although more recent, the Shepherds' work does not deal with the wealth of experiences that come from Mormon missionaries serving in any other culture. Additionally, the fact that they are siblings (and, in this case, identical twins) makes their work more about how specific family cultures, or individuals with similar upbringings, might engage in missionary work; more research on Mormon missionaries with diverse family backgrounds might demonstrate different results.

Because Mormon missionaries often are assigned to work with cultures vastly different than their own, the literature on acculturation and sojourning becomes pertinent. Mormon missions are difficult to compare to other acculturation experiences; they are too long and too complex to draw good conclusions about them from the related literature of study abroad programs, short-term mission trips, or humanitarian envoys (Trinitapoli and Vaisey 2009; Lee 2011; McCormick 1994). Sojourning, or living in another culture for an extended period of time without permanent immigration, aptly defines the experiences of Mormon missionaries (Siu 1952). The concept of the sojourner as a type of cultural actor was first discussed by Paul Siu. The four major characteristics of sojourners include having a specific job that does not compete with

local interests, associating almost exclusively with members of their own ethnic group, living in distinct cultural areas/enclaves, and creating a home-away-from-home while traveling back and forth between their cultures of origin (Ibid.). While researchers have applied sojourning to missionaries of other Christian faiths, this classification does not fit the nature of Mormon missions very well (Navara and James 2005; Navara and James 2002).

First, though they might be from the same religious group, Mormon missionaries are often paired with individuals outside their ethnic or national groups. Individual missionaries might have had distinctive experiences with Mormonism in completely different cultural contexts and for various lengths of time. For instance, my native companion, Elder Wong, happened to be from the first area I served in as a missionary in Hong Kong and had only been a member of the Church for one year before serving as a missionary. I was from Texas and was a first generation Mormon. And while this interplay is not unique to Mormons (other missionaries interact heavily with individuals from other cultures), the mission structure of the LDS missionary force creates a unique opportunity to evaluate sojourning in a new way.

Second, missionaries live throughout the geographic area of their mission but not in a collected form and certainly not in a cultural enclave. Most Mormon missionaries live with just a single companionship to a dwelling at a time. My mission had four missionaries per flat because of the extreme expense of housing in Hong Kong. But, aside from being concentrated in the geographic boundaries of the China Hong Kong Mission, I was isolated from the vast majority of my fellow missionaries. While the

geographic size of a mission impacts how close a missionary is to other missionaries, no informant I spoke with indicated any kind of Mormon missionary housing located in a single location for all the missionaries in their missions. Missionaries work and live among the people they serve.

Third, Mormon missionaries do not travel back and forth between cultures; they are assigned for a specified length of time and are not allowed to travel outside of their mission boundaries or travel home for any non-medical reason. I interviewed an individual who had to go back to the United States from South Korea because she was diagnosed with type II diabetes; she spent two weeks learning how to manage her condition and then returned to Korea. Missionaries from countries in Asia were often sent to the Hong Kong Mission to receive treatment for illness; however, when they got a clean bill of health, they returned to their previously assigned missions. In short, missionaries miss births, funerals, weddings, and any other major life event imaginable during their missionary service; they have dedicated their time and they are even more dedicated to their purpose as missionaries. And while returning to their apartments at night might be seen as a back and forth between Mormon culture and the local culture, Siu did not apply sojourning to the differences between culture that can exist between the home as a dwelling and the country you occupy (Siu 1952). Sojourning, despite some useful parallels to Mormon missionaries, cannot be used as a paradigm to adequately describe the complexity of the Mormon mission experience.

Geoffrey Navara and Susan James (2005) link the orientation of religion—how and why an individual chooses to practice their faith—to the level of acculturation.

However, in their sample, they ignore Mormons missionaries completely; and, while their article seeks to combine the positions of sojourner acculturation with religious orientation it does not methodically look at any specific denomination. Additionally, the missionary structure of Mormon missionaries, including the rules for missionary conduct, is substantially stricter than missionaries of other faiths. This structure makes it nearly impossible for the usual social supports the researchers prescribe to impact the formation of identity or their acculturation processes (Navara and James 2002). Bochner (2006) updates the concept of sojourner acculturation but applies it only to modern “sojourners,” completely excluding any discussion of missionary identity or strategy in the acculturation process. Chou (2013) brings in new research on Mormon missionary identity; and, while she does hint at the tension between Mormon mission culture and geographic culture, she focuses on the level of religiosity of former Mormon missionaries without touching on identity.

Mormon missionaries often interact with different cultural values that do not easily fit into Latter-day Saint theology. Lawrence Young (1994) summed up this tension perfectly: “Mormonism attempts to take the form of a community that was developed in a specific place—where the Mormon Church is one of the most powerful social actors—and to transport that community to other host societies that are not well matched” (56). Since the syncretization of the universal message with local traditions is not permitted in Mormon theology due to strict controls on correct doctrine, I am interested in examining how missionaries deal with this potentially sticky problem in an increasingly globalized world. Mormon missionaries do not have theological authority

to practice inculturation, or the process of changing doctrines to fit in differing cultural contexts, unlike other Christian sects. Therefore, I want to investigate how Mormon missionaries use folklore/folk culture—idioms, stories, jokes, history, etc. — to adapt their explanations of doctrine to different cultures. While there have been studies on Mormon missionary folklore from both general, and specific, cultural contexts (Wilson 2013; Knowlton 2013; Rudy 2013), I have been unable to find literature on the use of folklore in actual Mormon missionary teaching techniques; my research aims to begin to close that gap.

Rodney Stark (2005) predicts that Mormonism will soon arrive as the newest world religion taking a place among Christianity, Islam, and Judaism as a truly global religion. Furthermore, he states that, “there is no other religious denomination in the world—Catholic, Protestant, or non-Christian—whose full-time proselyting force is even close in size to that recruited, trained, and supported by the LDS Church” (Stark 2005, 128). Despite his claims of an ascendant Mormon faith, he is not interested in further development of the questions I have about the formation of missionary identity, the Mormon mission experience as a life event, or the use of folklore in adapting the message to new cultures. However, he does discuss how serving a mission is a “common cultural currency” that allows Mormon missionaries to form a distinctive co-culture which ignores age, class, and ethnicity as well as aids in the development of missionary identity inside Mormonism in general (Stark 2005, 129). Crapo (1987) deals with grass-roots deviance in the membership of the Church and how the lay membership can create identities that are actually counter to the core theological teachings of the

leaders of the Church without understanding that folkloristic process. Additionally, he fails to apply that thinking to Mormon missionaries and does not discuss how the same process occurs inside the mission structure itself. Phillips (2008) examines de facto congregationalism in regards to Mormon missionaries and Mormon congregations. While he stresses the importance of understanding that Mormon missionaries maintain distinct goals inside a unique mission experience that is separate and parallel to lay Mormonism, he does not discuss how that structures, or individuals, in the mission can form identity (Ibid.). He did, however, inspire my thinking about how Mormon missionaries could be seen as a co-culture which became vitally important in the formation of my hypotheses.

Overall, research on Mormon missionaries has neglected in-depth study of Mormon mission experience. Even general research on the history of Mormon missionary work is lacking. Bowman (2012) deals with the historical development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints very thoroughly; however, he fails to add anything to the general discourse about Mormon missionaries as either an important co-culture within Mormonism or as a crucial, formative time for many of the Church's membership. Recently, Neilson and Woods (2012) completed an edited compilation which has important chapters on Mormon missionary teaching materials and methods, on the history of missionary training, and on the nature of Mormon missionaries' purpose inside the greater whole of Mormonism. While this research is welcome and relevant, this scholarship neglects evaluations of individual experiences within various cultures as lived by those members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

who served as missionaries. Finally, Plewe (2012) recently authored a comprehensive atlas of Mormonism which dealt with missionary work; however, the overview was too broad and too shallow to address the questions I have posed for this research.

In the end, while all of these scholars have made important contributions to missiology or Mormon studies, their research interests do not speak to the issues of Mormon missionary identity during the missionary experience, how missionaries understand their missions as life events, or if they use folklore to aid in spreading the Gospel among different cultures. While it is a daunting task to try to simplify all of those complex processes, the hope of this research is that I can—in part—attempt to answer those questions and spur further scholars on in their exploration of the Mormon mission experience.

Our Course of Study

The outline of the dissertation will go as follows. The second chapter entitled “Mormon Theology; or, Why Mormons Send Teenagers to Your House” will outline the basics of the theological position of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I will explore the fundamentals of the message that Mormon missionaries share with people around the world. This chapter will also provide a working framework for understanding why Mormons feel missionary work is important as a religious responsibility. The chapter will be patterned off what the missionaries are charged with sharing as full-time representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The third chapter, “Mormon Missiology: Changes in Mormon Missionary Work Since 1830”, will briefly trace the historical development of missionary work in the

Church. I will trace Mormon missionary work from the beginning up to the present day detailing major events that changed how missionary work is done with a focus on changes in mission structures, missionary training, and teaching materials. To close, I will discuss aspects about Mormon missionaries, like finances and mission rules, as well as look briefly at the daily life in the mission field.

The fourth chapter, “Howdy, Hong Kong: My Missionary Experience in China”, will be an autoethnographic discussion of my own missionary experience in Hong Kong. As a candid look at my mission, I will trace my successes and failures as I navigated the culture of Mormon missionaries. There will be examples and experiences that will detail how my missionary identity formed; the chapter will also demonstrate how my personal experiences in Hong Kong inspired all three of the major hypotheses I am examining about Mormon missionaries.

The fifth chapter entitled “Studying (Latter-day) Saints: Methodology and Methodological Choices” will be a short introduction to the study area. I will outline the demographic information of the study, detail the methods used, discuss the interviewing process, and talk about both the benefits and drawbacks of trying to be a Mormon researcher negotiating your own cultural mores while attempting to do solid science.

The sixth chapter, “Demographic Descriptions: Occupation, Age, Ethnicity, and Sex”, is a short discussion of the impacts of demographic data on the hypotheses. There will be an analysis on how occupation, age, ethnicity, and sex correlated with the survey responses. The chapter will also include some thoughts about the greatest challenges

Mormon missionaries face and on which adjustment—missionary culture or in-country culture—was most difficult for them to make.

The seventh chapter, “Making a Mormon Missionary: A Study of Mormon Missionary Identity”, will detail the question of who inside the Mormon mission experience is most influential in forming missionary identity. I will outline the types of authority individuals could have—formal, chance/circumstantial, or cultural—and discuss the results of the research. I will end by situating the findings inside the large context of the Mormon mission experience and missionary identity.

The eighth chapter, “During My Mission”: A Study of the Mormon Mission Experience as a Life Event”, will detail how Mormon missionaries conceptualize their missionary experience as a life event. I will discuss the various responses and evaluate how those fit into the larger picture of the mission as a self-contained life.

The ninth chapter, “Transplanting The Gospel: A Study of the use of Folklore in Mormon Missionary Teaching”, will detail how, if at all, Mormon missionaries use folklore and folk culture to adapt their message to various local cultures. I will detail the responses of the interviews and discuss the nuances of the concept of adaptation to Mormon missionaries. The discussion will then turn to the reasons why Mormon missionaries do, or do not, adapt the message. Finally, I will talk about the explanation for why cultural adaptation of the message might not be the most useful metric for evaluating the teaching tactics of Mormon missionaries.

The concluding chapter will summarize what was learned about Mormon missionaries from the research questions and where the future of Mormon missiology, and the anthropology of Mormonism, might go.

At the end of this dissertation, the reader will also find various appendices that detail the interview questions, demographic tables, and the summary of the statistical results. Additionally, I have included a glossary of Mormon terminology that contains culture specific words, such as *ward*, *stake*, or *calling*, that I hope aids the reader in navigating some of the confusion of Mormon vocabulary.

CHAPTER II

MORMON THEOLOGY; OR, WHY MORMONS SEND TEENAGERS TO YOUR HOUSE

Imagine that we are coworkers. We work on the same floor of a high-rise office building downtown. Our offices are down the hall from each other. We are cordial; we say good morning to each other and have often worked on projects together. One day, we decide to go to lunch to discuss a new project that we will be collaborating on in the near future. As we are eating, you happen to notice that I am wearing an odd-looking ring with the letters C-T-R on it. You ask what fraternity I was a part of, because you assume that the ring is memorabilia from my college days. I laugh and say that it stands for “choose the right” and that it is a sort of motto of my religion. Now, although you are slightly embarrassed about the mistake, you ask what religion I belong to. I am LDS, I say, probably better known as Mormon. You have seen the Mormon missionaries before but never talked to them because they seemed slightly strange. Now, you are faced with someone who appears normal claiming to be of the same faith. Out of curiosity, you ask me what exactly Mormons believe that makes them different than other religions...

I cannot count how many times a scenario like the one I just described has happened to me. Despite having multiple chances to talk about my faith with others, I still have trouble trying to compress my entire lifestyle down to a quick conversation or a few pages in a dissertation. How do I begin to distill what I see as a complicated and

complex religious message into something that is easily understandable and non-frightening to another interested person? However, to understand why Mormons knock on your door, talk to you on the street or—more recently—offer to answer life’s religious questions online, as well as understanding what drives the Mormon missionary experience, a crash course in basic Mormon doctrine is necessary.

Since Mormon theology is built on divine inspiration and modern revelation, the most canonical texts are the Standard Works—*The Bible*, *The Book of Mormon*, *The Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*—and the words of current modern-day prophets. Rather than attempt to cite every doctrinal detail (which would fill an entire book), I have taken these explanations of doctrine from my own nearly 33 years of personal experience as a Mormon, from the LDS Standard Works, and from the new primer for basic doctrinal understanding, *True to the Faith*. Additionally, I narrowed the discussion of Mormon doctrine to a few basic beliefs that form the backbone of the Gospel message Mormon missionaries share around the world. The tone for this chapter will be informal; having been a missionary myself, a conversational style is the most comfortable way to talk about theology and is the method that comes most natural to me when discussing religious matters. It is my hope that, as a guide to Mormonism, I can provide a clear picture of the message the missionaries share while keeping this chapter well within the scope of inquiry for this dissertation.

God’s Plan for Humanity

Before we came to live on Earth, we lived with God the Father. He is the literal Father of all mankind; we are His sons and daughters. God the Father is a perfect Being

Who is omniscient and omnipotent; He has a physical body, like our own, except that He is glorified and immortal. We are members of His divine family with potential to become just like Him. He created the Plan of Salvation—with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ at its center—to help us accomplish the goal of returning to live with Him forever; He designed our physical existence on Earth as a testing ground to see if we would obey His commandments so that we could return to live with Him again after we die.

After creating this Earth, God physically created mankind and placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After partaking of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were forced out of the Garden in an event called The Fall of Adam. This Fall allowed for mankind to recognize good and evil, for the development of the entire human family, and the opportunity for each individual to make personal covenants with God in order to return to live with Him again.

The Importance of Jesus Christ

Physical death and spiritual death are the two major obstacles that prevent us from becoming like our Heavenly Father. Physical death simply means that we all eventually die when our spirit and body separate. Spiritual death is being literally cut off from the direct presence of God. Both of these conditions can be overcome through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ fixes the problem of physical death; everyone who has ever lived on Earth, or who will ever live on Earth, will be resurrected and receive an immortal, glorified, and perfect body. Our resurrected bodies will never get sick, die, or feel physical pain and will have all parts restored to perfect

working order. This is a free gift given to all of mankind whether they believe in Jesus Christ or not.

Spiritual death, on the other hand, is not overcome without individual effort. Adam and Eve did partake of the forbidden fruit—or the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—which removed mankind from the presence of God. However, we are not held accountable for that transgression. We are, though, held accountable for our own words, thoughts, and actions. God cannot look upon sin—which is willful disobedience to divine law—with any degree of allowance and He also cannot dwell with unclean things. It is against His nature; it is also contrary to the eternal laws He has set in place for the good of mankind and to which He is also subject. Therefore, when we sin, we create our own personal fall and spiritually separate ourselves from God. Thus, through our own choices, we cut ourselves off from God. Without the Atonement of Jesus Christ, our prospects for eternity would be bleak. We would forever be cast out of our Heavenly Father's presence and become subject to the devil and his angels, suffering with them for eternity.

Jesus Christ is the only Person born on Earth that had God the Father as both His spiritual and physical Father; Jesus Christ was the direct offspring of a divine Father and a mortal mother. This dual nature allowed for Christ to be able to feel the difficulties of mortal life, provide an example of how to return to God, and to make intercession—through His Atonement and Resurrection and because of his perfect, sinless life—to God on behalf of the whole human family. Because of his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus Christ is the Redeemer of mankind; His Atonement provides the only way for

humanity to return live with God forever. However, He does require that we accept His Atonement and are willing to sanctify our lives through obedience to His laws—called the Gospel—and to perform ordinances so that His sacrifice can enable us to return to live with our Heavenly Father. Jesus Christ is also our Judge; all mankind will stand before Him after death to be judged before being assigned to an eternal kingdom of glory.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Gospel of Jesus Christ—or the teachings He gave mankind to return to live with God—is comprised of two important components: laws and ordinances. The laws are the commandments that God has given us; these are written down in the canonical texts of the Church called the Standard Works (the *Bible*, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*) which comprise the standard by which our lives will be measured at the Final Judgment and contain the laws He wants us to follow. Those laws are supplemented by the direction of a living prophet who obtains God’s will for us today and who has the authority to interpret those laws, or receive new laws, for all of humanity.

Ordinances are sacred rites performed under the authority of the priesthood and are necessary to be able to return to live with God again. For all mankind, these saving ordinances include the following: baptism by immersion for the remission of sin, the bestowal of the Gift of the Holy Ghost, ordination to the Priesthood for all males, the endowment, and eternal marriage. The final two ordinances are extremely sacred and are performed only in the temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with

members who are in good standing in the Church. These ordinances provide each individual with all the promises, gifts, and covenants they need to obtain exaltation. Exaltation, as opposed to salvation (which is being freed from the effects of sin) is the highest gift our Father can bestow upon His righteous children. It is a fullness of eternal joy, the opportunity to live with Him again forever with our families, to be given all that He has, and to become like Him. In the end, however, ordinances alone are not enough to provide exaltation. We have to live the rest of our lives with obedience to the laws of God and keeping the covenants associated with those ordinances. Otherwise, they are null and void.

The Priesthood

As stated above, priesthood authority is necessary to perform the required ordinances to gain exaltation. The Priesthood is the power and authority to act in the name of God and to perform religious ordinances that are binding in this life and in the afterlife. This power is conferred upon all male members of the Church after being interviewed, and found worthy to hold this authority, by their local ecclesiastical leaders.

Inside the Priesthood itself, there are two priesthoods: the Aaronic and the Melchizedek. The Aaronic Priesthood is conferred upon young men when they turn twelve years old and is concerned with the physical outward ordinances of the Church. These include collecting offerings to help the poor and needy, the sacrament (preparing, passing to the congregation, and blessing), visiting the homes of the members each month to share a gospel message, and baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. The Melchizedek Priesthood, which is conferred upon male members after the age of 18,

deals with the higher ordinances of the Gospel and includes all of the responsibilities of the Aaronic Priesthood with the additional functions of being able to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, provide blessings of healing and comfort, and to officiate in all ordinances performed inside LDS temples.

Beyond the administrative functions of the Priesthood, priesthood authority is necessary for the performance of religious ordinances that are valid in the sight of God. Following the death of Jesus Christ and the martyrdom of the Twelve Disciples, the authority to run the Church, and to properly perform ordinances, was taken away from mankind. The Great Apostasy, where there was no person authorized by God to perform the ordinances of salvation, lasted until the Restoration where the Priesthood was returned to the world. The Aaronic Priesthood was restored on May 15, 1829 by John the Baptist and conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery; later in the same year, Peter, James, and John appeared and conferred the Melchizedek Priesthood on the same two men. Priesthood authority is not derived from certificates or seminaries of religion; that authority is bestowed in an unbroken line directly back to Jesus Christ Himself. These laws, ordinances, and priesthood authority comprise the complete Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prophets and The Restoration

Although mankind had been cut off from the presence of God, He did not leave His children without guidance. He called prophets to teach humanity about His character, His Plan of Salvation, and about the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. Because prophets can see and talk to God, they are witnesses for Him and obtain

revelation about His Will—and the Gospel of Jesus Christ—and have done so since the time that mankind was first created. This pattern of calling prophets continued until after the death of Jesus Christ and the martyrdoms of the Twelve Disciples. This is called the Apostasy; there was a general falling away from the truths of the Gospel and a subsequent loss of priesthood authority to perform saving ordinances. The Apostasy continued until the call of the first modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith.

In 1820, Joseph Smith was a 14 year-old young man who was confused about which church he should join. After attending different services and reading the Bible, he decided to personally ask God which church was His true church. In a forest near his home, he knelt down to pray. In an event now referred to as the First Vision, Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus Christ. They informed him that none of the churches of his day were correct and that they lacked the authority needed to administer the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Joseph Smith was commanded by God to restore the Church of Jesus Christ, which had been founded by Him during his mortal ministry, to the earth. As part of The Restoration, Joseph Smith was also commanded to translate, and receive, new scriptural records; the most famous, and the namesake for members of the Church, is the *Book of Mormon*.

The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ

Many faithful individuals sacrificed much, both before and after the Reformation, to protect, preserve, and mass-produce the word of God. Despite these well-meaning attempts, the *Bible* was corrupted through accidental errors in transcription or in purposeful, sinister omissions of truths by conniving individuals, or institutions, to

serve their own personal, social, political, or religious agendas. Therefore, the *Bible* was insufficient to establish a true understanding of God, His character, His Plan of Salvation, or His interactions with mankind. One of Joseph Smith's tasks as the first prophet after the Restoration of the Church was to retranslate the *Bible* and correct passages that were unclear or that had been altered. In addition to that translation, Joseph Smith was responsible for the translation of the *Book of Mormon*.

After a visitation from an angel named Moroni, Joseph Smith was lead to the location of a sacred record which was written on golden metal plates. Once this record was in his possession, God commanded Joseph Smith to translate the ancient text and publish it as the *Book of Mormon*. The *Book of Mormon* is the record of God's dealings with some of the original inhabitants of the Americas which includes ancestors of the Native Americans. It begins 600 years before the birth of Christ in Jerusalem as God commands Lehi, an ancient prophet, to lead his family to the Promised Land before the complete destruction of the city. Upon arriving in the Western Hemisphere, Lehi's family splits into two groups: the righteous Nephites and the wicked Lamanites. Primarily following the history of the Nephites, the *Book of Mormon* is another testament of God's dealings with mankind. The culmination of the book is the arrival of Jesus Christ to the American continent after His Resurrection. He teaches the people His Gospel and establishes His Church; however, 400 years after His departure, the Nephites become wicked and are completely destroyed in a great battle by the Lamanites.

The *Book of Mormon* is companion scripture to the *Bible* and is seen by Mormons as equally important in establishing the truthfulness of the *Bible* and the

doctrines that are contained in it. The *Book of Mormon*, though, contains the fullness of Christ's Gospel because, unlike the *Bible*, it did not pass through generations of transcriptions before being revealed to mankind. The *Book of Mormon* is considered to be the keystone of Mormonism. It is another, modern book of scripture that demonstrates God's love for His children.

Conclusion

The doctrines contained in this chapter comprise the basic tenets of Mormon theology. Understanding these doctrines helps answer questions about why Mormons send their teenagers to your home to talk about religion, why the Church invests so much of its resources into the missionary program, and why Mormon missions are complex—and central—experiences inside greater Mormon theology. In the end, the rationale behind Mormon efforts to share the Gospel is simple: Mormons sincerely believe these doctrines are true, that they have brought them happiness in their lives, and that sharing the Gospel message with others can bring them lasting happiness as well. In all senses of the word, happiness is the core message of Mormonism.

CHAPTER III

MORMON MISSIOLOGY: CHANGES IN MORMON MISSIONARY WORK SINCE

1830

Growing up, my father used to tell me stories about his favorite early Mormon missionary, Parley P. Pratt. Parley was on a mission near Kirtland, Ohio when he was arrested and brought to trial for a spurious charge. Without money to pay the fine, he was remanded to the custody of the local authorities. He was kept under guard overnight and would be transferred to a nearby prison the next morning. On the following morning during breakfast, Parley asked the local sheriff if he was a swift runner. The sheriff replied that he was not, but that his bulldog, Stu-boy, had been trained to run down fugitives and often assisted him in maintaining the peace. Parley asked the sheriff if he was up for a race and then bolted out the front door. Shocked, the sheriff sent the dog barreling after Parley. Yelling commands for Stu-boy to take the criminal down, Parley found the dog quickly on his heels preparing to attack. In a moment of inspiration, he stopped and began to yell the same commands at the dog pointing in the direction he was already running. Stu-boy ran past Parley and into the nearby trees with the sheriff in agitated pursuit. Parley lost the sheriff, and Stu-boy, in the forest and continued on with his missionary labors unhindered by either of them (Pratt 1985). Interestingly, if Stu-boy had gotten ahold of Parley the 2012 U.S. Presidential Race could have been very different: Mitt Romney is a great-great grandson of Pratt.

This early missionary account is very different than the experiences of Mormons missionaries in more modern times. Pratt was alone, he had no geographic boundaries to

his missionary work, he was arrested for preaching, he fled from the law, and he relied upon the goodness of humanity to provide for his food and shelter as an itinerant preacher. Today, no missionary would ever be sent as ambassador for Jesus Christ under these same conditions. Mormon missionaries, and the way they go about missionary work, have changed dramatically since the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830.

This chapter attempts to detail some of the changes in Mormon missionary work since 1830 and will trace several of the major events that altered how missionary work is done, especially focusing on changes in mission structures, training, and teaching materials. My goal is to demonstrate that these changes illustrate the trajectory of Mormon missionary work and provide the cultural context needed for a more generalized understanding of Mormon missionaries. To begin, there will be a discussion of how the missionary program of the Church developed. Next, I will move to a history of missionary training and the changes that have occurred. After that, I will talk about how missionary teaching has changed over time and what those changes signal. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a brief glimpse into the daily life of a missionary.

Missionary Structures

The first missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was Samuel Smith (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2007). The younger brother of Joseph Smith, Samuel apparently walked over 4,000 miles delivering copies of the *Book of Mormon* to the Midwest and New England regions of America in 1831-1832 (Gaunt and Smith 2008). In 2007, the Church reported that the one millionth

missionary had been called and sent out on a mission (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2007). However, the structure of missionary work has changed dramatically since Samuel first set foot off of the Smith farm in hopes of spreading the Good Word to his New York neighbors.

Roughly speaking, Mormon missions can be divided into two phases: the old mission phase from 1830-1951 and the new mission phase from 1951-present (Britsch 2012). Old missions, as a category, refer to the organizational structures of those missions and the administration of the Church in general during that timeframe. However, these two phases are not clear breaks in missionary work; there is overlap between them. When David O. McKay became the President of the Church in 1951, missionary policies, programs, and procedures begin to be reevaluated extensively; those efforts at improving missionary work continued until his death in 1970.

Before the formal organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, missionaries borrowed proselyting techniques from other Christian missionizing denominations; but, after the Church's founding in 1830, Mormon missionary work did not use other churches' models as the basis for their proselyting efforts. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mormonism thrives on the concept of continuing modern revelation. Any changes in missionary work come directly from God through His authorized servants, the Missionary Committee of the Church. This missionary committee, as prescribed by revelation, is composed of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; nearly all directives concerning changes in missionary work have come from this body.

In the old-phase missions, missionaries and mission presidents had tremendous authority and vast ecclesiastical powers. Mission presidents were functionally the President of the Church in their missions often running various church programs including church-owned farms, courts, schools, and stores. Aside from the physical administration of the Church in their mission areas, “every mission [president and his wife] had to be medical practitioners, counselors, psychologists, healers of arguments and hurt feelings, conveyors of good and bad news, and head theologians and defenders of the faith” which could be taxing, especially in a foreign culture (Ibid., 11). Old-phase missionaries were called to longer tenures of service which allowed them to spend time learning the culture (including art, literature, and music) of the peoples they were assigned to work with. Additionally, since there were no Church members that could be called into local leadership among the peoples the missionaries taught, they were often called as prominent and powerful local leaders to strength the Church. From the personal interviews I conducted for this project, I found that this is still common practice in areas where the Church does not have the local resources it needs to be administered properly. Multiple missionaries I spoke to had served as branch presidents—leaders of local congregations—while simultaneously working as missionaries to locate potential converts who could eventually take their place as the congregation head.

Initially, old-phase missionaries were often married, served for an indeterminate amount of time, and often without a missionary companion (Ibid.). These missionaries were more informal in their missionary approaches. Many of these missionaries were new converts who took the Gospel to their friends and family without a call from the

Church as formal missionaries (Whittaker, Early Missions 2012). The first tracts used by these missionaries were the scriptures themselves, particularly the *Book of Mormon*, and their style of proselyting was mixture of the ancient apostles, like Paul, and the itinerant preachers of the American Second Great Awakening which lasted from 1790-1840. More formal calls were eventually given and more formal structures began to emerge as Joseph Smith revealed more principles for missionary work from the Church center in Kirtland, Ohio. These policies included having missionaries sent in companionships of two, sending missionaries to foreign countries for the first time, conducting church conferences to disseminate correct doctrine, missionary training in the form of the School of The Prophets and School of The Elders, the publishing of official Church newspapers for internal communication and doctrinal rectitude, and keeping membership records of the converted to aid in Church administration. With an increase in the number of members, missionaries also were given official licenses as preachers and provided with more specific assignments regarding the geographic locations of their missions. As the Elders of the Church originally filled the role of missionary, the newly formed Church administrative position—the Seventy—became the main missionary force with 90 percent of the missionaries called eventually being drawn from that group.

Old mission missionaries also used various tactics to help spread the Gospel. Many returned to their hometowns to share their newfound faith with their friends and family. Some missionaries would travel through the countryside attempting to reach those who might be on the fringes of civilization. Others tried the circuit rider approach;

they would travel an area repeatedly preaching anywhere that was friendly to missionaries. Finally, the missionaries—employing tactics developed by Mormon missionaries in Britain—would rent halls, put advertisements in newspapers, and preach in the streets in an attempt at making converts.

While missionary work was growing inside the United States, missionaries also began journeying to other countries. The first missionary work outside the US was in Canada in 1832, the first mission outside North America was to Britain in 1837, and the first foreign-speaking mission was French Polynesia in 1844 with our friend Parley P. Pratt. Joseph Smith, following divine command, wanted missionaries to preach to as many nations as possible; but, most of the mission calls to exotic locales were short-lived and based on opportunity. For instance, members of the Church from England who were traveling around Europe, Australia, and India were called to preach to those people in addition to their pre-determined travel plans. Others missionaries were called to places where the work was challenging; Hong Kong, for example, had missionaries called in 1853 but the climate, politics, language, and food sent them home after a couple of weeks. Missionaries did not return until 1950. Most mission calls to foreign countries went unanswered and were not fulfilled by the body of the Church (Ibid.).

Members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles were called to serve as missionaries in the British Isles in 1837 and 1841. The success of the British mission established one of the most important missionary programs in the 19th century (Whittaker, *The Twelve Apostles* 2012). One of the apostles who served in Britain was Brigham Young; he would carry on the focus of missionary work following the

martyrdom of Joseph Smith. An avid missionary, Brigham served ten missions before he became the President of the Church in 1844 (Whittaker, *Missions of the 19th Century* 2012). After moving the Church west to Salt Lake City, missionary calls changed dramatically. Official missionary calls now included entire families as some were asked to colonize new areas and settle new communities; members could be called to establish new crops or to create industries in the Great Basin area. However, formal proselyting missionaries continued to make up the bulk of Mormon missionaries. These missionaries were typically married men, called from the quorums of the Elders and the Seventies. The length of their missions were from one-to-three years and they began missionary service at a much older age than the missionaries of today; the average ages of missionaries during this time ranged from 27 to 45 with younger missionaries generally assigned to more remote countries with longer terms for missionary service and older missionaries generally assigned missions inside the United States with shorter terms for missionary service. Missionary work continued along these lines until the Utah War—an armed conflict between the United States Army and the Utah Territory—which forced the Church to abandon all but the most successful missions for nearly 40 years. The 1890's saw the reopening of missions around the world and the expansion of the missionary force once again (Ibid.). In 1898, the first single Sister missionaries were called—Inez Knight and Lucy Jane Brimhall—marking the beginning of major female participation in the official missionary program of the Church (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2007). These structures—the formal call to service for Mormon men and women in specific geographic areas with a mission president—have

changed little since the 1890's remaining basically unchanged to this day. Most of the substantial changes in Mormon missionary work have occurred in either the training of missionaries or through the refinement of their teaching/proselyting tactics.

Missionary Training

Missionary training has changed dramatically over time. The old phase of missionary training began early in the history of the Church and was very limited. The School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio is the first formal attempt to prepare missionaries to better preach the gospel (Boone 2012). This school trained missionaries in basic doctrines and was run by Joseph Smith personally; Parley P. Pratt headed up a similar institution in Jackson County, Missouri at the same time (Cowan 2012). As Church headquarters moved west and with the missionary force of the Church curtailed, this type of individualized instruction was abandoned. However, with the creation of Church-owned schools in the 1880's, programs for missionary training returned in the form of missionary meetings. These meetings at Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah were extremely popular and were eventually approved by the First Presidency of the Church; but, participation in these meetings was limited to those members who were officially called as missionaries. The course was free and included the subjects like language, public speaking, penmanship and correspondence, singing, conducting meetings, and, of course, theology. This format was so successful that it was copied, with variations in courses and materials, at many of the other church schools and universities across the United States.

In 1924, the Church opened a mission home near the Salt Lake City Temple to help train missionaries who were being set apart and receiving their endowments prior to departing to their assigned missions. The length of missionary training conducted here ranged initially from a week, to two weeks, and then finally eight days; here, missionaries focused on manners and etiquette, health and hygiene, exercising, singing, and proper comportment (including dress) before becoming a full-time representative of the Lord. I personally interviewed three individuals who went to the Mission Home in Salt Lake. They told me that, upon arrival, they were assigned sleeping quarters similar to an army barracks, handed missionary lessons to memorize, and then left to their studies. When I asked if there was any additional training, they all spoke of the opportunity to attend the Salt Lake Temple and meetings with the General Authorities of the Church to receive specific instructions about missionary work. They all had fond memories of their short time at Church Headquarters and the excitement of finally being able to leave to their mission fields.

The new phase of missionary training begins in 1961. Up until this time, missionaries received no formal language training before going abroad. This caused some of the general leaders of the Church to call for opportunities for language training as early as 1947. They felt that the missionaries had to initially spend valuable proselyting time on language study which limited their overall effectiveness. However, this proposed change to language training would not occur until missionaries being sent to Mexico had problems getting entrance visas. Since the missionaries were only allowed to stay in Mexico for two years, Joseph T. Bentley—a former mission president

in Mexico—proposed a program for language training to be housed at Brigham Young University. While the missionaries waited three months for their visas, they could gain valuable language skills which would vastly improve their missionary work before entering their assigned missions. The Missionary Language Institute (MLI) housed missionaries near BYU with intensive language training during the day and subliminal language training in Spanish while they slept. At the time, Spanish was the only language offered at the MLI but that would change with the creation of the Language Training Mission (LTM) in 1963.

The Language Training Mission (LTM) marked the first time that the entire missionary training program was housed in a single area. Eventually, the languages offered at the LTM expanded as more returned missionaries and international students helped teach the missionaries cultural and language skills. My father attended the LTM to learn German before his mission in Hamburg, Germany. He remembered the intensive—almost militant—training procedures, the camaraderie of the missionaries who all lived within close proximity to each other, and spending long hours in the classroom attempting to imitate their instructor’s German accent.

The LTM eventually was unable to handle the influx of missionaries serving foreign missions. While the missionaries who did not need to learn a new language were still receiving their training in Salt Lake City at the time, the LTM became overcrowded and inadequate. The creation of a new complex, the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo, Utah solved that problem. The MTC allowed for the benefits of language training that came from native speakers, BYU professors, and returned missionaries to

continue. In 1978, the First Presidency decided to close the Mission Home in Salt Lake and to centralize all missionaries at the MTC in Provo. Some aspects of the Salt Lake Mission Home were incorporated into the development of the MTC; for instance, general leaders of the Church would come to visit the missionaries once a week and provide training. Missionaries were grouped into branches and local priesthood leadership was provided to give the missionaries individualized spiritual attention. Other notable changes to missionary training included the expansion of languages offered at the MTC, the creation of missionary study helps such as the *Missionary Guide*, and new missionary discussions that focused on presenting the message without an emphasis on memorization. Since 1978, the Church has opened and closed MTCs in other countries to facilitate missionary training across the globe; there were even phased-training opportunities for missionaries going to a country where an MTC was located to spend half of their time in Provo and the other in-country (Ibid.).

In October 2012, the President of the Church announced the lowering of required age for missionary service to 18 for males and 19 for females; previously, the ages were 19 and 21 respectively. Missionary applications surged from 58,700 in October 2012 to 80,300 in October 2013 (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2013). With so many new missionaries, a shorter stay at MTC was implemented in order to get more missionaries through the training centers (Myrick 2013). Additionally, the Church has made plans to dramatically increase the size of the MTC in Provo to accommodate this dramatic increase of missionaries (Walch 2013). How the Church will continue to

handle the training, and housing, of increased numbers of new missionaries has yet to be seen.

Missionary Teaching

As I mentioned earlier, old-phase missionaries had very different proselyting techniques. Prior to the 1950, there were no official missionary lessons provided by the Church; old-phase mission presidents were responsible for producing tracts, lessons, and other proselyting programs for their specific missions (Duffy 2005). *A Marvelous Work and A Wonder*—which was a series of lectures on Mormonism by LeGrand Richards, a former mission president of the Southern States Mission—and the Anderson Plan/*A Plan for Effective Missionary Work*—which was developed by Richard Anderson while on his mission to the Northwestern States under the direction of his mission president—were two early attempts at providing materials to help with missionary teaching. These rudimentary teaching plans mandated that the missionaries spend an extensive amount of time with investigators before baptism. Richards wanted truth-seekers to meet with the missionaries weekly for at least six months; Anderson, on the other hand, called for twenty-eight discussions before baptism (Ibid.). These plans, couched in an old-phase paradigm for missionary teaching, included a chain of scriptural references to introduce gospel topics, questions to guide the missionary through the teaching process, and a variety of suggested Gospel topics to discuss with investigators (Wright and Doot 2012). Supposedly, Anderson’s plan was wildly successful and eleven thousand copies were distributed after mission presidents across the globe began requesting them (Duffy 2005).

In the early 1950's, the Church began to standardize the missionary materials marking the new phase of missionary teaching. Anderson's Plan became the template for the creation of new missionary lessons with Richard's book later incorporated into part of the standard missionary library (Wright and Doot 2012). Anderson's Plan had four distinct pieces: it focused on the object and purpose of a mission, it made improvements in teaching over past itinerant preaching methods, it focused on the *Book of Mormon* with a heavy emphasis on placing the book with investigators, and finally it suggested scripted dialogues to discuss with interested individuals (Ibid.). These ideas would find their way into the first set of lessons published from Church Headquarters in 1952: *A Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel*. Gordon B. Hinckley, a future president of the Church, would head up this project in an attempt to make the missionary effort more uniform across the globe; however, although it was officially published by the Church, this program was optional (Duffy 2005). Missionaries were instructed in the four phases of proselyting—how to make the first contact, from contact to investigator, teaching the investigator, and from investigator to convert—as well as basic missionary skills (Wright and Doot 2012). The *Program* had seven lessons which focused on the doctrines of Mormonism and allowed for the incorporation of visual aids to improve teaching and create understanding (Ibid). These new lessons were structured like Socratic dialogues between missionaries and a hypothetical investigator named “Mr. Brady” with a heavy reliance on logical arguments and scriptural references (Duffy 2005). They also included a list of scriptures to be memorized, one hundred pages of teaching dialogues for the missionary to be familiar with, and forty pages of introductory

materials (Wright and Doot 2012). This format would only last nine years before being replaced in 1961.

In 1961, Hinckley and the Church Missionary Department would introduce the next iteration of missionary teaching at the first worldwide training meeting for mission presidents: *A Uniform System for Teaching Investigators* (Duffy 2005). These six lessons would become the first missionary program that was mandatory for use in all missions; they were also the first time the “lessons” would be called “discussions” (Ibid.). The *Uniform System* shortened the introductory materials from forty pages down to two which now focused on teaching principles; however, it still retained a list of scriptures for memorization and about one hundred pages of dialogue (Wright and Doot 2012). Mr. Brady was transformed into Mr. Brown who was lead with specific questions and answers to reach series of logical, numbered conclusions (Duffy 2005); missionaries were encouraged to memorize, and stick strictly to, the prepared dialogues (Wright and Doot 2012). Missionaries were also encouraged to use a flannel board—one of the individuals I interviewed talked extensively about it—to give visual variety and clarity to their spoken discussions (Duffy 2005). There was a focus on direct language with an expectation of investigator action and a development of the discussion as a serious opportunity to learn truth (Wright and Doot 2012).

However, the *Uniform System* had its limitations. First, the amount of memorization was difficult for many missionaries in such a short time; the expectation was that they would be able to master all of the discussions within a few weeks of being a missionary. In reality, that would prove difficult for many missionaries especially

when compounded with the problems associated with learning a new proselyting language. Second, memorization discouraged a real Gospel discussion; instead, it forced rote presentations that did not have as much of an emotional impact on investigators. The standard dialogues placed investigators in situations where they felt coerced or manipulated into following the missionaries' line of logic despite their own concerns (Ibid.). Finally, according to Wright and Doot (2012), with an increasingly secular society, the central message of the Restoration of the true Church became less relevant; this would eventually lead to the Church and missionaries focusing on the family as part of its central missionary message. This version of the missionary discussions would last three years longer than their predecessor before also being replaced in 1973.

The Uniform System for Teaching Families debuted in 1973. This new variation of missionary teaching saw the discussions grow from six to seven lessons (Duffy 2005). Unlike previous versions, they were printed in a two-column style. The left-hand page contained teaching aids useful to missionaries like suggested scriptures or responses for common problems that investigators might bring up; the right-hand page was the presentation that the missionary was supposed to make to the investigator. Mr. Brown continued to be a vital part of the discussions; but, he did not have predetermined responses. Missionaries were free to present more open-ended questions and to use a flipchart of Church-approved pictures to supplement their teaching, abandoning the use of flannel boards. These discussions were edited three times before Church leaders commissioned the creation of a completely new set of discussions. The improved

discussions were piloted in 1985 and were eventually published as *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* in 1986 (Ibid.).

The fourth version of formalized teaching (and the one I used as missionary), *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel*, changed the required number of missionary discussions again. There were six discussions that needed to be taught to the investigator before baptism; additionally, there were six new member discussions that were taught after baptism. Also called the Rainbow Discussions—each of the lessons had a different color on the front cover—they were printed with two columns as in the 1973 edition with the addition of helpful anecdotes or examples to illustrate doctrinal teachings at the end of certain principles. One of my favorite teaching aids from these discussions dealt with the unauthorized printing of driver's licenses. Used to illustrate the point that priesthood authority comes only from God, the story asked if making your own driver's license would allow for the legal authority to drive a car. The obvious answer is that the fake driver's license is not legally sanctioned; the investigator was supposed to draw the conclusion that any religious rite performed without proper priesthood authority would be like the self-made driver's license: invalid. These discussions focused heavily on the commitment pattern which was a model of conversion outlined in the Standard Works of the Church. The commitment pattern taught missionaries to prepare people to feel/recognize the Holy Ghost, to invite people—after feeling the influence of the Holy Ghost—to make commitments (like reading the *Book of Mormon*, praying, keeping the Word of Wisdom, Law of Chastity, and Law of Tithing, attending church, be baptized, etc.), and then to follow up with the

investigators to check on their progress and to help them resolve any concerns that they might have. Attached to these discussions was a primer called *The Missionary Guide* which trained missionaries on how to implement the commitment pattern into their teaching and how to incorporate its principles into their relationships with other missionaries including their companions. The flipchart was still the primary visual but the Church also began producing VHS and DVD films that could be used to supplement the material in the discussions. Lasting nearly twenty years, *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel*, would be replaced in 2004 by the most current missionary teaching program *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*.

Eventually, four major concerns would give rise to the development of *Preach My Gospel*. The first was the retention of converts; although people were still joining the Church because of missionary work, many were not staying as lifetime members (White 2012). Second, the number of convert baptisms worldwide was declining despite a missionary force that was larger than it had ever been. Third, there was a sense of complacency that had settled into missionary work after *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel*; missionaries had once again fallen into the habit of memorization leading, once again, to robotic presentations of a dynamic message. And fourth, members who were returned missionaries were moving from being active members to inactive members which particularly disturbed Gordon B. Hinckley who was now the President of the Church. To address these issues, the Church Curriculum Committee was formed in 1999, “with the commission to identify problems with the missionary curriculum and recommend changes” (Ibid., 153). They identified three major problems

with the *Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel*: 1) the number of missionary programs, policies, and procedures created over time to help missionaries actually hindered their ability to preach the gospel with unfettered conviction, 2) the role, and institutionalization, of memorization in mission structure was too cumbersome, and 3) the commitment pattern, and its enormous influence on all aspects of missionary work, taught skills but did not translate into increased productivity. After four years of research, the Church produced *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service*. This new program did away with the six discussions instead opting for smaller, more compact lessons. These lessons could be tailored to the amount of time the missionary had with a potential investigator; there are outlines for short, medium, and long lessons. The *Missionary Guide* also disappeared and skill-based learning was dramatically decreased in favor of subsections defining how missionaries could effectively conduct their work in areas like contacting and Gospel study. The commitment pattern, which featured heavily in the 1986 discussions, also was also removed. In its stead, *Preach My Gospel* focuses on the conversion process of “teach[ing] the gospel by the Spirit, build[ing] faith in Jesus Christ, invit[ing] to repent, prepar[ing] to be baptized and confirmed, [and] help[ing to] make and keep covenants” to aid in an investigator’s entrance into the Church (Ibid., 159). Additionally, unlike previous missionary programs, *Preach My Gospel* was also the first missionary program made available to the general body of the Church with encouragement that it be used for personal, family, and Sunday study. How *Preach My Gospel* will continue to refine missionary work, and what program will

eventually take its place, is a fascinating chapter of Mormon missionary teaching that has yet to be written.

Missionary Life

To end this chapter of Mormon missiology, I want to discuss some of the aspects of missionary life. This section will provide a more complete picture of the mission experience as well as provide additional context for the following chapter about my own mission.

Since missionary service is voluntarily, the prospective missionary is expected to contribute all the necessary funds needed to serve. Before their missions, future Mormon missionaries work and save money to pay for their support as missionaries. Individuals who want to serve as missionaries, but who cannot financially afford to, are supported by their local wards and by the general missionary fund of the Church. A mission costs roughly 10,000 US dollars; those funds cover missionary clothing, supplies (luggage, camera, scriptures, etc.), housing, and food for the duration of the missionary's service. The support funds for the missionary are paid once a month to the local ward and are forwarded to Church Headquarters in Salt Lake. From there, they are then sent to the various missions and disbursed to the missionaries via the mission home.

After meeting with their local ecclesiastical leaders and submitting a missionary application, prospective missionaries can begin their missionary service at age 18 for males and age 19 for females. For both sexes, the upper age limit to start missionary service is 26. Unlike in the past, young missionaries cannot be married and serve as missionaries. Mature couples, called senior missionaries, are married couples who serve

as missionaries together. Missionaries are assigned their mission calls—or their geographic area of service—by a member of the Church’s ruling bodies: The First Presidency or the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. These calls are made after obtaining revelation from God about where a missionary needs to be assigned for their missionary service.

Inside the mission itself, the chain of command starts with the mission president. He is the spiritual leader of the mission and can alter general mission rules—but not Church-wide missionary policies—to fit local circumstances. He has two Assistants that are trusted missionaries who help in training other missionaries and run some of the administrative aspects of the mission. The mission is divided into large geographic areas called zones and smaller geographic areas called districts. The zone leaders and district leaders are the backbone of mission leadership and are responsible for helping the missionaries assigned to them in their proselyting efforts. Each district is composed of multiple areas with a single companionship of missionaries responsible for the missionary work in that geographic location. Missionaries have multiple companions over the course of their missionary service; companions can serve together for days, weeks, or months (my shortest companion was two weeks; my longest companion was four-and-a-half months). In all missionary companionships, there is a senior companion, who is responsible for their own companionship’s work, and a junior companion, who is responsible to work with, and follow, the senior companion in finding new individuals to teach.

Missionaries generally find people to teach through contacting. The methods for contacting people to teach can include talking to people on the street, going door to door, locating people who requested materials (such as scriptures or Biblical movies) from the Church, serving in the community, obtaining referrals of people to teach from local members, or, more recently, using social media to talk with interested individuals online.

Rules for missionary work, contained inside the *Missionary Handbook*, are very strict; they provide guidance to missionaries helping them focus on their purpose as servants of the Lord as well as help to control missionary behavior (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2006). Dress code for Mormon missionaries generally includes a suit, tie, dress shoes, and white shirt for males and dresses, nice shirts, dress shoes, and knee-length skirts for females. Missionaries put all aspects of normal life on hold during their service. They do not date. They are not allowed to watch TV, listen to secular music, read the news or magazines, see movies, play sports or video games, use the Internet for personal reasons, or call home (except on Mother's Day and Christmas). They provide community service, help with disaster relief, and go to the temple to perform work for the salvation of the dead. The hallmark of missionary life is service which includes the sacrifice of individual personal comforts, or preferences, to serve God and His children. At the end of their missions, missionaries are released from missionary service; missionaries can also be released early from missionary service due to medical issues or continued, and/or serious, infractions of missionary rules and expectations of conduct.

As stated above, missionary work is done in companionships. These are pairs of missionaries of the same sex who work together in a single proselyting area. While serving a mission, an individual missionary is never alone. Companions are in constant physical proximity of each other with the instructions to be within sight and hearing distance of their companions at all times. Obvious exceptions to that rule would be when a missionary goes to the bathroom, has a confidential interview with the mission president, or is formally assigned to labor with another missionary for a short period of time. Companionships live in the same apartment and share the same bedroom. Missionary companionships are assigned by the mission president who receives revelation from God about which missionaries should be paired together and how long individual companionships should last.

The daily schedule for missionaries is extremely rigorous. At 6:30 a.m., missionaries are supposed to be awake, pray, exercise for half an hour, and get ready for the day. At 7:30, it is time for breakfast. At 8:00 a.m., missionaries are supposed to have personal Gospel study using the scriptures, the approved missionary library, and *Preach My Gospel*. Following personal study is companionship study which starts at 9:00; missionaries are supposed to share spiritual lessons they learned during their private study with their companions. Additionally, companionships are to prepare their lessons for the investigators they will teach that day and to practice teaching skills with their companion. Finally, they can study chapters from *Preach My Gospel* and use any remaining time to confirm their proselyting plans for the day. At 10 in the morning, the missionary schedule diverges. For those missionaries not learning another language,

proselyting/contacting begins. Missionaries learning another language are allowed an additional study time—lasting for up to an hour—for language practice. Interspersed through the day are two one-hour meal times; at 9:00 p.m., the missionaries return home unless they are teaching but they must be home by 9:30. From 9:00 p.m. to 10:30, missionaries plan their next day's activities for half an hour, write in their journal, get ready for bed, and pray. At 10:30, the missionaries retire to bed. One day a week is designated as preparation day. Usually on a Monday, preparation day is when missionaries buy food for the week, wash their clothes, clean their apartment, write/email letters home, and have the opportunity to visit approved cultural sites around the mission. The rest of the week, and the bulk of a missionary's day, consists of teaching, visiting local members, finding people to teach/contacting, following up on referrals from other missionaries in other areas, and missionary training meetings.

Conclusion

From a fairly loose structure to a tight organization, from no real theological training to intensive training in a controlled environment, and from no official missionary lessons to Church-mandated missionary teaching programs, missionary work has drastically changed in structure, training, and teaching since its inception in 1831. Early missionaries, like Parley Pratt or Samuel Smith, would hardly recognize the missionary program of the Church today. As the Church has grown, and encountered new situations and changing global cultures, the mission program has adapted to meet those needs. As the digital age continues, it will be fascinating to see where the

missionary structures, training, and teaching policies/procedures change to better spread the Gospel around the world.

CHAPTER IV

HOWDY, HONG KONG: MY MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE IN CHINA

As I alluded to in the beginning of this text, I am a returned missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; I served in the China Hong Kong Mission from October 2000 to September 2002. Like many returned missionaries I interviewed, I loved my service as a missionary despite the difficulties of missionary life. Since I defined the purpose of ethnography as making the unexperienced experience-able in the introduction, I am sharing my missionary journey here as a glimpse into the life of a Mormon missionary. This autoethnographic account will be a candid look into a sacred, beautiful, and complex time in my life. My experiences as a missionary are personal; they continue to be the fingerprints of faith that have defined my identity since I returned home almost 13 years ago. However, attempting to condense over 800 pages of journal entries, letters, reports, and photographs—not to mention two years of missionary life—has proven to be more difficult than I imagined. I have culled the most useful material for this chapter; hopefully, it will give the most accurate, and objective, picture of Mormon missionary life as possible.

Autoethnography

Before I begin, there needs to be a quick discussion about the role of autoethnographic research in anthropology. In general, autoethnography is a methodological choice to draw upon your own experience—especially in connection to the groups you are a part of—to enhance ethnographic inquiry; the researcher is, at some level, the subject of the research (Allen-Collinson 2013). Originally, autoethnography

meant discussions of cultural informants about themselves (Heider 1975). Later, it also came to mean the detailed study of your own cultural group, or a group that you self-identified with (Hayano 1979). Ellis and Bochner (2000) identified three axes—the self, the culture, and the research—as the indicators for the complicated interactions that compose autoethnographic inquiry. Supplementing this concept, Chang (2008) argues that, “autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (48). I will attempt to accomplish those three objectives as I discuss my own mission inside the greater context of Mormon missionary work.

Autoethnography allows for researchers to draw upon their own personal experiences to supplement their cultural analysis, provide additional emic insights, and approach research in a more holistic manner (Allen-Collinson 2013). However, it can also spiral into academic storytelling if it is not grounded in additional cultural actors beyond the authors themselves (Chang 2008). For the purposes of the text, I am approaching autoethnography from the perspective of autobiographical ethnography—or the use of my own personal experiences to better enhance the general ethnography of Mormon missionaries—a concept that comes from Reed-Danahay’s (1997)

Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social.

Like all ethnographic research, I—as the researcher—am a force in shaping the outcome of the research. In this chapter, I had to choose which stories I would incorporate and which stories, while interesting, I would not. Therefore, I am active as the author in making decisions about representation of myself as a Mormon missionary;

as Berry (2013) suggests, there are “myriad” decisions that I have made—consciously and unconsciously—about the representation of any aspect of my research subject. I hope, in the end, that I have made the choices that represent best the scientific, and the spiritual, components of an anthropological study of Mormon missionaries.

The rest of this chapter will be gathered from my own experience as a missionary. I will begin with some experiences that led me to being a missionary. I have included them because other returned missionaries I have known—and those I interviewed for this project—expressed similar stories about pivotal times in their lives, and experiences with God, that motivated them to serve as missionaries. And while I cannot collect, or properly represent, the experiences of others in regards to their choice to serve as a missionary, I can provide my own context to give insight into why Mormon missionaries decide to serve and how they make that life-changing decision. After that, I will order my experiences from what I consider are the most common, shared characteristics of missionary life to what I consider the most uniquely peculiar characteristics of my own mission to flesh out the ethnographic picture of Mormon missionaries more fully.

How I Became a Missionary

My mother and father are both converts to the Church; so, I grew up as a first generation Mormon. My father had served a mission in the Germany Hamburg Mission as a young man. My mother was preparing to serve a mission when my father asked her to marry him. They both stressed the importance of serving as a missionary; but, like good parents often do, they allowed me to make my own decision about a mission.

Looking back, I never felt any sort of familial pressure to go. And, despite the expectation that every worthy young man serve a mission, I really never felt any religious pressure either. However, if I really analyze my life, three experiences stand out as watershed moments that crystallized my commitment to serve a mission.

The first experience happened when I was just an infant. My mother was lying in bed and thinking about the pressures of raising children in an uncertain, turbulent world. As she was about to fall asleep, she heard the Lord speak to her and say, “Terri, I am sending you sons; train them up to be missionaries for Me.” My mother would often speak of that experience as we were growing up. And, as promised, she had three sons who all served as missionaries. I do not doubt that my mother received divine guidance on how to raise her sons and how to prepare them to be missionaries. Because of this intimate communication, I knew that Lord wanted me to serve a mission and that knowledge profoundly shaped the young man I would become.

The second experience happened when I was 14. We were going to move away from the only house I had ever known and I was going to be starting high school in the fall. In short, my life was going to be thrown into complete chaos; I needed reassurance that everything was going to be fine. Before we moved, I asked to receive my patriarchal blessing. Patriarchal blessings are sacred, and prophetic, communication from God containing warnings, promises, and expectations for your life; they are a deeply personal set of instructions from God to you. They are recorded, transcribed, and even stored by the Church should you ever lose it and need another copy. Among the

many things detailed in that blessing, there was one paragraph specifically about my full-time mission. It reads:

The Lord desires that you engage in a mission to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world. There will come that opportunity and you shall serve with distinction. You will, however, be challenged and difficulties will attend you, to try and temper your spirit. It will be for your learning and for your good and upon your return, you will be the better person for having faithfully served.

Once again, the Lord had spoken—this time to me personally—about the importance of a mission in my life. My patriarchal blessing made it clear that I needed to serve a mission, that it would make me a better person, and that it would be the hardest thing I had ever done. As I laid in my bed on my final night as a missionary in Hong Kong, I reread that paragraph; I can still remember both the sadness I felt at the fulfillment of that passage and the profound gratitude I felt for seeing those promised blessings occur while I was a missionary.

The final experience occurred shortly after I started high school. In my 9th grade World Geography class, we were on a unit that dealt with world governments. I remember thinking about the future often as a teenager and, on this particular day, I was thinking about where the most difficult place to serve as a missionary would be. My teacher was talking about China, and the impending turnover of Hong Kong to the Communist regime in Beijing, when I had very distinct picture come into my head. I

was a missionary in a basement talking to a group of Chinese people about Jesus Christ when CCP soldiers burst in and began waving their guns around. Demanding to know who I was and what I was doing, I attempted to produce my passport and explain myself in broken Chinese. As I fumbled through my coat pockets, the soldiers thought I was reaching for a gun; I was promptly shot dead. It was a weird daydream; but, the words “Hong Kong” remained in my mind. I think the Lord was trying to tell me about my future missionary service five years before I would receive my formal mission call. I had completely forgotten about that impression until I opened my mission call; upon reading where I was to be assigned, that experience snapped immediately back to my mind: I was going to be a missionary in Hong Kong.

Those experiences dramatically shaped how I approached missionary work, how I understood my calling and responsibility as a missionary and—to a large extent—my attitudes about the Chinese and about the problems I would encounter 8,000 miles away from home.

Pre-Missionary Preparation

The journey to the MTC was a whirlwind. After completing my ecclesiastical interviews, and being endorsed as a missionary candidate, I waited to receive my mission call. When it finally arrived, I was nervous; the time had come for me to put my faith to the ultimate test. Enclosed with my mission call were pages of information—the geographic map of my mission, a biography of my mission president, requirements for missionary equipment, standards for missionary dress, a massive list of immunizations required, and passport information—that detailed specifically the exact preparations

needed before I could report for training in Provo, Utah. I spent the next couple months assembling all the necessary items, forms, and shots I needed; on October 11, 2000, I entered the MTC. After a short meeting describing the blessings of missionary work, I walked out one door to my new missionary life while my parents and younger brothers walked out another. We would not see each other again for nearly two years.

The MTC

I am the first to admit that I was not the best missionary. Despite my jovial nature, I am actually very shy and somewhat introverted. I do not like to bother people and I found it hard to strike up conversations with strangers about religion. However, I do think that I went on a mission for the right reasons; I had a conviction of the importance of what I was doing, I loved God and I wanted to serve Him, and I knew how the Gospel had blessed my life and wanted to sincerely share that with others. I soon found out that not everyone who went on a mission had the same motivations.

The MTC is located in Provo, Utah and borders the campus of Brigham Young University. It is a very large complex. The hub of the MTC, the Woodruff building, housed administrative offices, classrooms, and the cafeteria. Surrounding the Woodruff building were a gymnasium, a post office, a small store for missionary essentials (like scriptures or snacks), the Snow Auditorium for devotionals on Sunday evenings, a barber shop, four buildings dedicated to missionary classrooms, and ten multi-story buildings for housing the missionaries. The MTC is, for all intents and purposes, a self-functioning missionary system.

As far as training goes, imagine confining nine 19-year-old boys to a small classroom to study language and culture ten hours a day for three months straight. The daily rotation consisted of waking up at 6:30am, breakfast, sitting in class for four hours attempting to learn new Cantonese words and sentence structures, lunch, another four-hour session of Cantonese grammar, dinner, a nighttime three-hour class session of Gospel-related Cantonese vocabulary, and then into bed at 10:30pm. It was a grueling schedule meant to prepare you for life in the mission field. Aside from the personality problems inside my MTC group, the thing I remember most from my time in the MTC was a persistent feeling of complete exhaustion due to the missionary schedule.

My MTC group, the other eight missionaries assigned to the same mission and who shared a classroom with me, had daily arguments which sometimes broke out into fist fights. Tensions ran high as we all tried to come to grips with our new life as missionaries. We were supposed to try and speak Cantonese as much as possible in order to improve our language skills; but, our incorrect pronunciations of Cantonese sounds and tones turned poor Cantonese into unintelligible Cantonese. Personally, I struggled to understand Cantonese sentence structure and I was so tired that I often fell asleep in class completely missing large sections of language training. I had an awesome MTC companion and we got along great; but, that friendship was one of the only bright spots in an otherwise taxing three months. By the time we finally got to leave, I was happy to be gone and I never looked back.

Hong Kong, Here I Come

When I arrived in Hong Kong, I was exhausted and stir crazy. I had never been on an international flight before; and, after eight hours on the flight, I was convinced I could swim to Hong Kong faster than the plane could fly there. I remember how beautiful I thought Hong Kong was and how excited I was to make it my new home; I especially remember the lush green tropical forests and the colorfully bright Hong Kong skyline. The next couple of days were a blur as I got adjusted to the climate, the air pollution, and the unique odor of the open-air markets.

Missionaries do not get much cultural training, aside from the language, before they leave the MTC. For the first six months, I muddled my way through conversations, social interactions, food, and manners. While I adjusted to the many cultural differences—like gestures and saving face—easily, I never adjusted to what I called “the two B’s”: bumping and burping. Avoiding physical contact with another person on the streets of Hong Kong is all but impossible; you will bump into someone—often fairly hard—and then keep on walking as if nothing happened. Because of my upbringing, I made it a point to say “excuse me” whenever a collision occurred. I remember one missionary asking me why I said anything; the Chinese people obviously did not care and often were confused when you made any attempt at an apology after ramming them accidentally. I told him that, while my situation had changed, my sense of manners had not. I was going to do what I thought was socially proper despite cultural differences.

In Chinese culture, it is polite to burp during a meal. It shows respect for your host and indicates that a meal was not only delicious, but was appreciated. Based on my

previous story, my approach to table manners probably is very obvious. In reality, it was the opposite; I had no problem with a healthy belch at the table accompanied with a personal thank you. What did get under my skin was attempting to apply Chinese cultural traits to our Westernized living space. I told other missionaries that our apartment was not China, it was the American embassy; as such, American manners applied. I was often told that we were supposed to be as Chinese as possible. I agreed; but, I also said that we had certain expectations of proper behavior from home that we did not eliminate just because we were out of our country. These conversations usually ended with grumbled compliance from most of the missionaries I lived with.

These two stories represent the depth of decision that formed my identity as a Mormon missionary. Every day, missionaries have to navigate culture and create a new persona that they feel is both culturally, and personally, acceptable. And, that is not an easy process. When I finished my mission nearly two years later, I was a completely new person. Pieces of my Hong Kong identity survive to this day and influence my decision-making, family traditions, and work ethic. In the end, I was sad to leave a place that had grown to be my home; in many aspects of my life, my heart never fully left Hong Kong.

At this point, I am going to transition slightly. I initially decided that the best way to demonstrate the experience of Mormon mission was to describe the experiences that I felt were unique to my mission and, in some cases, to me as an individual. During my interviews however, I realized to a greater extent how different from, and how similar to, my mission was to those individuals I spoke with. I want to highlight some

items that stood out to me as differences between my experience in Hong Kong and other experiences from other returned missionaries in Hong Kong and around the globe. For the sake of simplicity, I decided to rank them starting with what I felt were the most shared common experiences between all missionaries to the most extraordinary ones centered around my specific geographic, temporal, and cultural circumstances.

Junior Companion

All missionaries enter their missions as a junior companion. As a junior companion, you are supposed to listen to, and follow, your senior companion. While you are expected to provide input, advice, and express concerns, the final decisions about any aspect of missionary work, especially proselyting, are all made by the senior companion. It is a position of very little power usually reserved for new missionaries who are learning the ropes; however, missionaries have been moved back to junior companion from positions of high power in the mission for two reasons. The first, and most common reason, was that they were breaking, or continue to break, mission rules. In that sense, being a junior companion is a demotion and a severe loss of autonomy. The second, and fairly rare, is that their expertise and skill are used to bolster an unsure missionary and to help train him or her to be a better, more confident leader. I liked being a junior companion, generally speaking. I had excellent senior companions who really listened to my input; and, I felt they sincerely had my best interest in mind when they pushed me out of my comfort zone. Learning how to be a useful junior companion, who truly supported your senior companion, was extremely difficult. I do not think I

ever mastered it; but, I do feel that I honestly gave being a junior companion my best effort.

Senior Companion

All missionaries, at some time in their missions, are assigned as a senior companion. You get to be in charge of the work in your companionship. With your junior companion, you set proselyting goals and carry out the work of the Lord in a specific geographic area within the mission boundaries. In my mission, once you became a senior companion, you stayed one until you finished your mission. The only exceptions were missionaries who were not following mission rules. Even missionaries who did not actually do any missionary work whatsoever were still senior companions. This fact was (and I imagine still is) a source of difficulty for many missionaries around the world. Being a senior companion, however, brings its own set of challenges. You are now the leader and not the follower; and, that process is not always an easy transition. I found it carries a new weight of responsibility as you feel a special duty to help your junior companion succeed as a missionary. I think that I internalized that struggle and became very concerned about the general welfare of my junior companions. I was not the best senior companion; but, I sure tried to make sure that my junior companions felt that I cared about them, missionary work, and our success. At the end of my mission, I can honestly say that I left each companionship with a new friend despite some extreme personality differences and personal challenges.

Trainer/First Companion

Training a new missionary in the field is typically reserved for missionaries who, for some reason or other, are excellent missionaries. They might have superior linguistic skills, be a dynamic teacher, possess sharp proselytizing abilities, or be emotionally empathetic. And while there are bad trainers/first companions (mission presidents can only work with the individuals they are sent), for the most part being a trainer signals some sort of missionary prowess. I had an opportunity to train a new missionary while I was in Hong Kong. Training a new missionary is a lot like being a parent; in fact, in Hong Kong we referred to each other as dads/fathers and kids/son. Not only are you responsible for your own missionary area, you shoulder the burden of the companionship almost completely on your own. New missionaries understand very little about missionary work and force you to take many aspects of missionary life very slow. In a missionary culture obsessed with maximizing the use of time, a new missionary can be especially taxing.

Combined with the difficulty of learning a language and a new culture, a new missionary can be an exhausting experience. But, it can also be a great experience as well. I focused a lot of my efforts with my kid, Elder Lowry, on equipping him with the coping skills to be a good missionary in the long term. We spent extra time going over missionary skills and the language in an attempt to prepare him for the rest of his mission. And while we came from different backgrounds, we were able to get along very well. We also had a unique situation in that Elder Lowry was much older than the usual missionary; I do not know how much a 26-year-old adult fancies a 20-year-old

“kid” being in charge but if there was ever a problem, he never said anything. Probably the best part of being a trainer/first companion is being able to see how much you have grown as a missionary, being able to introduce your trainee to the coolest aspects of the mission (like food) while trying to shield them from the hard parts (like depression), and being able to re-experience the magic of the mission through a fresh perspective. In a lot of ways, training a new missionary is like going to Disneyworld with a child for the first time; it is refreshing to get to relive the sense of newfound wonder through different eyes.

District Leader

Being a district leader brings with it a different set of challenges. First, you are expected to be an example of stellar missionary work with the understanding that your companionship outperforms the others inside your district. In reality, the missionaries I supervised were generally better missionaries than me despite my best efforts to lead by example. Your missionary world expands as you are now responsible not only for your own investigators and your companion but for the other companionships and the investigators they have as well. Additionally, you have to train other missionaries, run weekly district meetings, coordinate district proselyting, conduct baptismal interviews, and handle any issues that the missionaries might be having all while trying to do your own missionary work.

Perhaps the most fun part of being a district leader, however, was getting to go on exchanges. You would split up your companionship and pair with a different missionary; you generally would spend the night, plan, study, and work together for the

next day. It was an interesting opportunity to get to see other missionaries' styles of doing missionary work; surprisingly, inside the rigid framework of missionary structure, there are a wide variety of techniques that can emerge. One missionary I worked with liked to show pictures of his family as a teaching tool; another liked to teach using scriptures from the Bible while on street; and, a third missionary would drop his name tag and ask for someone to help pick it up as a method to strike up a conversation. These three techniques are just a few among the hundreds of approaches to missionary work I saw as a district leader. Observing these patterns of missionary work allowed you to juxtapose styles and meld them together. Over time, my missionary work became a hybrid of the styles of missionary work I encountered through my service as a district leader.

Zone Leader

Being a zone leader at the end of my mission was a new challenge that I did not anticipate. With little time left as a missionary, I had gone to talk to my mission president and was candid in that fact that I wanted to finish strong but that I was having a hard time focusing on my work. He told me that it sounded like I wanted a challenge. Reluctantly, I agreed. A couple of days later, he telephoned and asked to speak to me. I was called to be the zone leader of the International Zone which was the largest zone in the mission at the time. I remember distinctly feeling overwhelmed as I walked back out of his office. At the time, his two Assistants were missionaries I had served with, lived with, and lovingly respected. They smiled at me and said, "Welcome to the pit." I was going to be doing a completely different missionary work. The International Zone was

the top-baptizing zone in the mission. Missionaries in that zone were responsible for any person in Hong Kong interested in hearing the Gospel message who did not speak Cantonese. And, I had two weeks to learn how to be a completely different missionary before I took it over. In general, zone leaders are responsible for their own work, their district leaders and the health of their districts, missionary training, zone goals for proselyting, and baptismal interviews. In other words, I had a full plate.

The best thing about being a zone leader in a zone that covered the entire mission was that I could go anywhere and not have to ask for permission. Inside the mission, there are strict rules about leaving your proselyting area which are in place to protect missionaries and to control their movement. Missionaries have to ask for permission from their district leader to leave their proselyting area but stay within the boundaries of their district. If you want to stay inside your zone but leave your district's area, you need permission from the zone leader. And, if you wanted to leave the zone, you had to have permission from the Assistants to the President. I hated having to ask for permission to go places as a missionary; for some reason, that process just really annoyed me. As the zone leader for the International Zone, I was free to go wherever I wanted whenever I wanted. And go I did. I took my companion to the farthest reaches of our mission in hopes of finding new places rife with people prepared to hear the Gospel message. I also spent a lot of time with my district leaders, and the sister missionaries, trying to make sure that they were all taken care of. Like the beginning of my mission, the last five months of my mission were a complete blur as I was busier than ever and doing my best to keep on top of all of my newfound responsibilities. And,

I could not have done it without an awesome companion, Elder Burk, who was willing to help me do anything I needed. In the end, my mission president was right; the challenge of being a zone leader kept me pushing until the very end.

One Apartment, Multiple Missionaries

Usually, a single set of missionaries occupy an apartment. However, in Hong Kong, it was too expensive to put missionaries in individual apartments. At the time, we were told that Hong Kong was the second most expensive mission in the world. Tokyo was the most expensive with Hong Kong and Zurich switching places between second and third depending on global money markets. My family must have expensive tastes; my younger brother was called to serve in Zurich and left six months after I got home from my mission in Hong Kong.

With four missionaries in an apartment, you could run into various problems. First, you had to secure study space. Normally, this was not a problem; but, it can be very hard to study when there are other people studying different things in your close vicinity. Silently reading your scriptures when someone ten feet away is loudly attempting to practice Cantonese sounds and tones can create friction. There was also more limited space in the kitchen which made storing your groceries for the week very difficult. You had to figure out times to shower, shave, brush your teeth, and use the bathroom that would not conflict with other missionaries. Each apartment only had one telephone, and with two sets of missionaries trying to contact investigators, set appointments, and turn over referrals to other missionaries in the mission, getting to use the phone at night was a constant battle. These problems were generally handled with

understanding and little drama although the potential for a powder keg was always present.

There were positive things about having four men to an apartment. In one of our apartments, we pooled our support money together to buy higher quality food for our Sunday night dinner. After a long week of being a missionary, steak and potatoes never tasted so good. If for some reason you were having difficulties with your own companion, you could always talk to the other Elders in the apartment as a release valve and for suggestions that could help the relationship. Hong Kong was not an easy mission; we faced a lot of rejection as missionaries. On the darker days of the mission—and they were not few—you could turn to support from your brothers-in-arms. I was buoyed up many times by the testimony, example, and service of other missionaries I lived with. And, you could always bounce ideas for improvements in missionary work off these missionaries as well as swap funny stories from that day's proselyting work. Apartment mates often became some of your best friends in the mission and they could make you inadvertently famous. By the end of my mission, I was known as the pickiest eater in the mission; for about four months in one of apartments I lived in, I ate only Kraft Mac N' Cheese every day for lunch and dinner. When I left that area, it took me nearly three years before I could eat macaroni and cheese without throwing up.

A First World Experience in a Third World Country

Hong Kong is a weird mixture of modern and wild. My first area was in the New Territories; I loved that area. It was thick, lush, and green. I felt like I had stepped into a South American rainforest; the animals and plants were vibrant and beautiful. Thirty

minutes down the MTR line was Central. Central is the bustling, cosmopolitan heart of Hong Kong with Western shops and electronics markets everywhere. Hong Kong is this odd composite of the First World and the Third World all mixed together. I met a family of farmers who had lived on the same plot of land for 1,600 years and who were still using outdoor plumbing with little electricity; I met powerful business magnates with huge mansions, high-tech cars, and a fleet of private planes. It was like living in two completely different missions; as you got further away from Hong Kong Island it became less crowded and more rustic. Going back and forth between the ancient and the future—many of the mobile devices we use today I encountered in Hong Kong years before they would arrive in the States—provided time to reflect on the differences in culture as well as the great disparity of wealth in such a small geographic area. As someone who had a comfortable life in my own country prior to serving a mission, it was eye-opening to see two different worlds so close to each other.

A Geographically Small Mission

My mission was not the tiniest one (a personal friend served in a mission that was only a couple of square miles) and it was not the largest (I interviewed someone who served in Russia; it took 18 hours to traverse the mission from one end to the other). With the total area of the Hong Kong mission measuring roughly 426 square miles, I felt like we had a small mission. I could be to any missionary in less than 30 minutes time. This created a sense of closeness among the missionaries. But, it also caused problems. There were times when gossip about missionaries and certain areas would spread through the mission rather quickly. On the positive side, we could get together often

with favorite missionaries and former companions to socialize on our preparation day. However, this could also lead to disobedient missionaries reconnecting despite the mission president's best efforts to keep them apart. It also meant that one could run into Church members you worked with in former congregations, return to former areas to sightsee, and have parties celebrating mission milestones.

On the year anniversary of starting our mission, my MTC group met at Shek O Beach to have a barbeque. Since missionaries do not swim, we built sandcastles instead. Some of us started digging a large hole and other missionaries asked what we were doing. We said that we were starting to dig a hole back to America; everyone had a good laugh. I can only imagine what the Chinese people on the beach were thinking about a bunch of white kids digging a hole in the sand and laughing hysterically. This type of memory was only possible because of the size of the mission. And, with no other missions bordering ours (another oddity), it really felt like a home away from home.

My Native Companion

When I was in my second area of Kwai Fong, my native companion, Elder Wong, and I had a tough time together. We liked each other well enough but he could not really speak English and I had barely functional Chinese. The language issue, coupled with the fact that he was my junior companion and had to follow around a foreigner in his own country, provided an opportunity for hard feelings to develop. But, we both tried hard to understand each other. He only knew a couple of English words and the song lyrics to "What a Wonderful World" by Louie Armstrong. You have never

heard Louie Armstrong until you hear a native Chinese speaker do their impression of him. To this day, I cannot hear that song without smiling and thinking of him.

It was also difficult to get used to the fact that we had different styles of teaching. Since he knew the language, I would let him answer the more challenging questions posed by investigators. I remember being lost on occasion and having to double check the conversation to make sure I knew what was going on. I also remember when he told me I was a horrible companion and, when I asked him if I was doing anything right, he answered with a curt “no.” Despite all of these things, I learned a lot from him. I came to appreciate the Chinese people in a completely new way especially after being able to visit his home for Mid-Autumn Festival; I still remember lighting paper lanterns on the front porch and eating mooncakes while talking about our missionary work with his parents. I think he thought my proselyting style was a little lax. While I was committed to sharing the Gospel, I did not appear to feel the same urgency about the message as he did; and, I believe that profoundly irritated him. But, by the time we left each other, we had developed a mutual trust and love that transcended our cultural differences. Sadly, he is one of three companions I lost contact with; even now, I often wonder what has happened to him.

Trained by a Future Assistant to the President

My trainer/first companion, Elder Rasmussen, was from Sandy, Utah. Before his mission, he was a body builder and very into playing sports. I have the body of an academic and was co-captain of my debate team. So, we were the perfect match for each other. We were stationed in Tai Po, a beautiful smaller city in the New Territories

of Hong Kong where we lived above a mall which we had to cross through to get to our apartment. It was weird having to walk through a business to get to my house every day; I never did get used to Hong Kong zoning laws.

He had a very dynamic style of interacting with the Chinese. As one of his teaching techniques, he liked to pretend to write Chinese characters on his palm; this either elicited laughter or compliments from the people we met. He also preferred having our companionship stand in a high-traffic area for hours at a time while frantically trying to talk with anyone who would pass by us. He had a great relationship with the local members and I could tell that he was respected in the congregation. He tried to feed me any type of Chinese food we could get our hands on and he was not afraid to introduce me to his favorite local foods. Four of those dishes became staples of my mission: barbequed pork, fried sesame and green onion bread, pineapple bread, and sweet waffles filled with peanut butter, sugar, and sweetened condensed milk. On our first day together, he would not let me unpack when we got to the apartment. He said that we did not want to waste time we could be outside sharing the Gospel with setting up house.

He liked to eat on the street and often asked me how fast we could eat so that we could get back to work. I asked him if it would be ok to eat at home and if we could take the full hour allotted for our meals. He grudgingly said he could. In our first week, after eating lunch and still jet-lagged, I laid down to rest for the remaining half hour of our lunch break. He burst in the room and yelled at me saying, “We either work or we eat; but, we do not sleep.” Within a minute, we were back out on the street proselyting. At

our next meal, I ate quickly and then decided to study for the remainder of the hour to “rest.” Five minutes before our hour was up, he gently reminded me that it was time to get back to work. That practice became a habit I carried through my entire mission.

He never got angry with me and he let me struggle through teaching. He taught me that practice does not make perfect; practice makes permanent. Many of the foundations of my missionary work became permanently etched in my life because of him. Later, when he was called to be the Assistant to the President, a position of extreme trust in the mission, I realized that I had been given the best possible start to my new life as a missionary.

Speaking Cantonese

When I went into the MTC, I was told that we were learning an F5 language. There were only three of these languages in the world and they were supposed to be extremely difficult to learn for native English speakers. Finnish apparently had 13 different verb conjugations that confused new language learners. Navajo, the language used by the US military during WWII to code covert messages, had grammatical structures that were extremely complex. And then, there was my mission language: Cantonese. Cantonese is a tonal language (like Mandarin) that requires precise control of sounds and throat movement to produce the correct word. While Mandarin has five tones, Cantonese has nine; it was complicated further by the fact that one sound in Cantonese could have multiple meanings depending on the tone. And, the meanings were not similar either. Depending on the tone for the sound *gwai* the word could mean ghost, turtle, obedient, expensive, or cabinet. The first time I asked for a glass of milk

while eating with the local members, I accidentally transposed my tones. Instead of asking for cow's milk, I asked for a glass of human vomit. The members never let me live that one down.

I spent at least thirty minutes every day of my mission practicing my vocabulary, trying to improve my sounds and tones, and learning new idioms. I was particularly fond of idioms because they taught Gospel principles simply and, more importantly, they always made people laugh. And, like any other language, speaking Cantonese would have good days and bad days. There would be times where you would say hello to someone on the street—a phrase I felt like I said a million times—just to have them stare at you and say they did not understand English. Other times, you would be complimented on your Chinese and on how well you spoke for being there such a short time. I would often get asked if I had Chinese grandparents and people would chalk up my language abilities to being a “mixed” child. Despite my protests that my family all came from Europe (which is true genealogically speaking), I would be told I was good at Cantonese because of my imaginary mixed-Chinese heritage.

I remember being out with my native companion, Elder Wong, and talking to someone on the street. After Elder Wong introduced himself and taught a little of the first discussion, the guy turned to me and asked what he had just said. I repeated what he had just taught. The gentleman then asked where we were from. I responded that Elder Wong was from Hong Kong and I was from Texas (which was one of the four states the Chinese knew about; the other three were New York, California, and Florida) and that I had only been in Hong Kong about a year. He did not believe me and insulted

my companion by saying that my Cantonese was better than his and that he should practice more. Needless to say, Elder Wong was not pleased with that assessment of our language capabilities or losing face in front of me. I do not think he said another word to anyone on the street that entire day.

Just in case I come off as a Cantonese hotshot, I was not. I never really learned how to write Chinese and I could read the basic characters in words I saw often (like bathroom or school). Other missionaries in my mission were much more successful at the language than I could ever hope to be. I used to joke with other missionaries that I prayed for the gift of subtitles. The gift of tongues, or the ability to miraculously learn new languages at an astounding rate, is something that Mormons believe is real. I used to say that if Heavenly Father would just show me a translation of what people were saying, I was sure I could respond properly. Not surprisingly, the gift of subtitles never manifested itself.

Cantonese was a blessing and a curse. When I was complemented for my language abilities, it built me up; and, when I people on the street gave me a confused look and said they did not speak English, it kept me humble. To this day, Cantonese is still a sacred language to me.

Hong Kong Temple/Hong Kong Mission Home

Temples are sacred structures believed by Mormons to be the House of The Lord on Earth. Used for performing ordinances for both the living and the dead, all temples are holy places. Imagine my surprise when I arrived in China to find out that the mission home (the central hub for the administration of a mission) was located inside the

Hong Kong Temple. Land in Hong Kong is incredibly expensive; so the Church made the pragmatic decision to incorporate two important buildings into a single structure. The second floor of the temple housed a chapel and classrooms for Sunday meetings; the third floor was the mission home, the mission president's quarters, and the temple president's quarters. The remaining floors—the basement and ground floors as well as the fourth and fifth floors—functioned as the temple proper. The mission home has since been moved to Hong Kong Island but, at the time, it was the only mission home in the world that was located inside a temple; and, as far as I know, it still is. The symbolism of the mission home and the temple being combined was not lost on me and became one of the greatest take home lessons from my mission. I have many fond memories of the majesty, and eternal importance, of my mission home as a sacred structure for learning deeply spiritual, and practical, life lessons.

Being a Hong Kong Temple Worker

As previously discussed, the temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are sacred places where the most holy ordinances are performed for both the living and the dead. For most missionaries, the last time that they got to attend the temple and perform those ordinances was at the MTC in Provo, Utah which borders the Provo Utah Temple. By the time I started my mission in October of 2000, there were only 100 operating temples across the globe (11 of those were in Utah and 50 were in the US); so, unless you served in the United States, your chances of being near a temple—let alone the opportunity to perform temple ordinances on a regular basis—were extremely slim. However, the China Hong Kong temple was located within the boundaries of my

mission. Even more unique, however, was that mission leadership (the Assistants to the President, zone leaders, and district leaders) got set apart as temple workers. We would help run endowment sessions every month and got the opportunity to serve in a capacity usually reserved for older lay members of the Church. I really enjoyed the chance to serve the Lord in two different ways as a missionary; I got to help with redeeming the dead and preaching the Gospel at the same time. I have never met another missionary (aside from those in my mission) who got to serve in the temple. Most missionaries, at my time, did not even have access to one within their mission boundaries.

President Hinton's Connection to Hong Kong

Mission presidents come from all walks of life and some have served missions while others have not. My mission president, Donald Ray Hinton, happened to have served in the mission as a young man in the 1960's. I can think of only a handful of other Mormons I have met who had a mission president who also served in the same mission as young adult. The fact that he had served in Hong Kong lent an extra air of credibility to him; I felt like he truly understood the difficulties of being a missionary in my specific situation. He also was very passionate about us respecting Chinese culture and working to build good relationships with the members. He was extremely proactive in working with the local leadership to make sure that they were working with the missionaries effectively. He shared funny stories from his time in Hong Kong as a young man and he tried to teach us about the history of the Church in our mission. He was a professor of communications before he was called as a mission president; and, I think that is one of the reasons I chose to pursue academia myself. He loved the mission

and the Lord; I count myself extremely blessed to have had the opportunity to learn from, and serve with, him.

A High Percentage of Sister Missionaries

Sister missionaries create a whole new dynamic in the mission field. When I served, the youngest Sister was at least two years older than the youngest Elder. Many Sisters had been in college before serving and some were close to graduating. I have met many missionaries—both male and female—who disliked working with Sisters. My mission president made it explicitly clear that the Sisters were an important part of our work as missionaries and that they should be treated with respect and their feelings/opinions carefully considered in any leadership decision. And, my mission had a lot of Sisters. Out of the 180 missionaries in our mission, 45 were Sisters. In fact, I was told that we had the second highest number of Sister missionaries in the world, aside from the mission at Temple Square in Salt Lake City which is staffed almost completely by Sisters (they act as tour guides and cultural ambassadors to the thousands of visitors there every year).

I personally served with many different sets of Sisters and I took my responsibilities as their priesthood leader, and fellow servant of God, very seriously. They added a depth and perspective to my missionary work that could only be gained from a female worldview. I remember when I became a district leader and had Sisters transferred into my district; the opportunity to work directly with the Sisters felt like a great vote of confidence from my mission president. At the end of my mission, I was put in charge of the zone with the largest amount of Sisters. I went to great lengths to

make sure that they knew they had my ear when they needed to talk and my support for whatever challenges they faced.

Bilingual: A Missionary Tag in Two Languages

Mormon missionaries are known for their iconic black name tags. Worn in your front pocket, clipped on your collar, or pinned to your shirt, they are symbols of your commitment to the Church and to the Lord. But, our mission had missionary tags unlike any mission in the world: our tags were bilingual. The left half of the tag had our name and the name of the Church in English; the right side was the same information in Chinese. They were really heavy compared to the average missionary tag (and good for warding off dogs if you needed something to throw). Our mission was the only mission in the world authorized to have a tag with two languages on it. Personally, I always thought they were a reminder about the dual nature of being a missionary: you are a foreigner that was called by God to become as Chinese as possible. Putting on that tag every day moved you from being a somewhat normal person to a person with a distinct spiritual responsibility and identity; the intensity of feeling associated with that black name tag goes beyond explanation.

Call 9-1-1 for America

Missionary life is so completely absorbing that it creates an emotional vacuum around significant world events. I remember when September 11th, 2001 happened on my mission; the Chinese called it 9-1-1 because of the connection to the American phone number for emergencies. My companion, Elder Wong, and I were in a discussion when we got a page that some planes had crashed into the World Trade Center. The

world changed dramatically that day; but, as a missionary with a message of hope, there was no time for reflection or sadness. I had a job to do. President Hinton provided us a steady stream of information about what was happening worldwide; he told us to stay away from American-owned businesses (like McDonald's) and to lie about our nationality if we were asked about it on the street. The missionaries wanted as much information as possible—especially the group of missionaries who were going home within days of the attacks—about what was happening abroad. It was a turbulent time for many of the missionaries I served with as they struggled to come to terms with the violence, and death, associated with the crashes juxtaposed against the peaceful message of love they had dedicated two years to sharing.

Roughly a year after the attack, I came home. I could not understand the emotional connection everyone had to 9/11. I was sad for my country and for the people who lost their lives but there was a weird emotional void for me. To me, 9/11 was another day on my mission; to my family and friends, it was a devastating day of mourning. Even now, I still have no connection to that traumatic time in US history. I exist as a stranger in my own culture. September 11th further shows me that my thoughts, my desires, my emotions, and in some ways my essential self, were completely removed from real life during my service as a missionary.

Conclusion

I could go on about my mission for hours; I know many of the informants I interviewed did. I hope this autoethnographic chapter showed at least some of the aspects of being a Mormon missionary. And, while a lot of the things I talked about are

specific to my individual mission, any missionary would be able to relate to at least some my experiences. But more importantly, this chapter demonstrates how my own personal experiences as a missionary directly led to the formation of my research questions. And, as I will explain in the following chapters, some of those experiences created incorrect assumptions about Mormon missionaries and missionary work while some were far more correct than I could have ever anticipated.

CHAPTER V

STUDYING (LATTER-DAY) SAINTS: METHODOLOGY AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

To answer the questions of who is most influential in shaping Mormon missionary identity inside the mission structure, how Mormons view the mission as a life event, and the use of folk culture by Mormon missionaries in adapting the message to unique cultural situations, I applied my autoethnographic research to the greater Mormon community at large. In other words, I knew the answers to those questions from my own missionary experience; what I was hoping to find was whether my predictions held true across vastly different Mormon missionary experiences.

As I soon found out, “unexpected the expected” should be the first rule of research. As I started this project, I was fairly confident that I had set manageable scholarly goals. I had organized all of my initial research, I had a working timetable for results with plenty of time for analysis, and I thought I understood the scope of the project well enough to comfortably predict when I would be able to confidently report my conclusions. And, I was wrong on nearly all accounts. Anthropology deals with people; and, people were more unpredictable than my calculated research predictions could have ever anticipated. The purpose of this chapter is to detail how I went about my project, including the setbacks, to demonstrate the difficulty of attempting to answer meta-questions about the nature of the Mormon missionary experience.

The Study Area

I wanted to look at questions that impacted Mormon missionaries on a general level. My goal was to expand the research beyond the one geographic, or cultural, region I experienced as a missionary. And to accomplish that task, I needed information far beyond my limited engagement with missionary work in Hong Kong; to be frank, I needed other insider perspectives. The problem was Mormons, like any other cultural group, are composed of diverse sets of individuals. Returned Mormon missionaries do not all live in one geographic area; they are not all the same gender, ethnicity, age, or culture. And, while a shared faith unites them, returned Mormon missionaries can have widely different feelings about their missions and their time as missionaries. However, the role of anthropology is to combine the emic and etic perspectives to create the most complete picture of cultural diversity possible. But, anthropological methods do not always mesh neatly with the concerns, or the structures, of the communities we attempt to inhabit as researchers. My methodological approaches to participant observation, surveys, and face-to-face interviews hopefully best captured the diversity of Mormon missionary experiences in a meaningful way.

The methodological justification for participant observation is simple: it is the method most commonly used in the discipline to obtain information about cultural practices. Participant observation is especially well-suited to study cultures when 1) there is little known about the cultural phenomena being studied, 2) there are fundamental differences between the emic and etic perspectives, 3) the cultural practices being evaluated are not accessible to outsiders, and 4) the cultural practices are not

subject to the eye of the general public (Jorgensen 1989). Since the earliest days of professional anthropology, participant observation has method of choice to unlock these nuances of culture (Dewalt, Dewalt and Wayland 1998). However, within the realm of participant observation, there can be four separate types of engagement with research subjects. The first type of participant observation is nonparticipation, or where the anthropologist gleans ethnographic information from secondary sources only. Moderate participation, the second type, is where the ethnographer interacts with the research subjects occasionally and generally records things present at the scene of action without active participation. Active participation, or the most traditional mode of ethnographic inquiry, is where the researcher actually engages with the culture on as many levels as possible. Complete participation, although relatively new, is where the ethnographer already occupies a place as, or becomes, an actual member of their research group (Ibid.). From the previous chapter, it should be obvious that my approach to participant observation in this project is a combination of active and complete. Beyond ease of access and preexisting intimate knowledge about Mormonism, an in-depth study of Mormon missionaries requires these methodological choices.

The recent second phase was the more formal academic portion of the project, and consisted of an online survey and of intensive face-to-face interviews. In the following two sections, I will address these two more formal methodologies in greater detail. Using congregation lists and a rough number of returned missionaries provided by the College Station Stake, I scheduled appointments with returned Mormon missionaries. I got really good at spewing out my research purposes over the phone as I

attempted to convince possible interviewees about the importance of my project in a minute or less. I enjoyed playing detective as I used any method possible to try and locate other returned missionaries without a phone number, address, or other form of contact information available. I had fascinating conversations with complete strangers about gardening, competitive car racing, and local architectural history. I got lost; I got ignored; and, I got told that soliciting was illegal more times than I can count. Through it all, I was able to develop delightful relationships with new people, find the information I was looking for, and thoroughly appreciate the entire research process.

Part One: The Online Survey Adventure

I chose not to pilot my survey or interview questions before beginning the project because the research timetable for the dissertation was tight. I did, however, show the questions to multiple returned missionaries to get their feedback and to check for clarity. Their help in refining the concepts and adding new lines of inquiry, however, was indispensable and sincerely appreciated.

The online survey was where the bulk of the data came from. I wanted to collect 1,000 useable surveys from returned missionaries around the globe. With a sample size that large, I believed there would be ample data for analysis while still being manageable within the time constraints of the project. The survey went live on June 15, 2013 and closed on December 1, 2013 which allowed potential respondents roughly five-and-a-half months to complete it. When the survey closed, I had 935 recorded responses. However, only 875 of those responses were usable. I chose to remove surveys that were incomplete on three or more questions. Most often, the unusable surveys were

incomplete with respondents not fully entering their demographic information or completely omitting the actual questions. This method yielded the widest possible number of returned missionaries with the greatest number of responses. The online survey had two sections. The first section opened with questions asking for basic demographic data: age, sex, ethnicity, occupation, country of origin, country the mission was served in, the beginning and ending years of service, and the formal name of the mission. The second section of the survey consisted of four multiple-choice/ranking questions.

The most obvious advantage of using a self-administered survey is that I was able to avoid interviewer bias (I am not physically present to manipulate the responses). However, because I did not have any interaction with the respondents, I also could not help clarify potentially confusing questions. Another disadvantage was that I had no way of knowing if the respondent actually met the criteria for inclusion in the project (i.e. was a Mormon returned missionary); additionally, I also ran into some general sampling issues. Because of the way I chose to release the survey, the possible exclusion of those respondents who do not use Facebook or those with limited access to a computer became a potential problem that I had no real solution for.

For the dissemination of the online survey, I sent the survey link to individuals I knew on Facebook who were Mormon, asking them to take the survey if they were returned missionaries, and then pass it on to other returned missionaries. Snowball sampling is a particularly useful method for studying hard-to-find/hard-to-study cultural groups or groups where the population of potential respondents is spread over a wide

geographic area (Bernard 2011). Since I do not know where all possible returned Mormon missionaries are, or even who they are, this method seemed the logical choice to capture the largest amount of data. As the survey circulated through cyber-space, I would have days (and on one occasion, weeks) where no additional responses would appear. On the other hand, I had responses skyrocket from 234 to nearly 600 after the survey link was placed on a popular Mormon blog by one of the respondents. Although, I missed the target by 125 surveys, I felt that 875 useable responses were adequate to provide the breadth and depth of data I required. After compiling the data, and with the help of a professional statistician, I conducted Chi-Squared tests to determine if there were correlations between any of the demographic variables and the survey answers.

Part Two: The Face-to-Face Interviews Journey

If the purpose of the surveys was to answer the question of what, the purpose of the face-to-face interviews was to answer the questions of how and why. In other words, the interviews would provide ethnographic depth and flavor to the raw data. I chose to sample five congregations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Bryan/College Station, Texas area. These congregations were the Bryan 1st Ward, the YSA Traditions ward, and the College Station 1st, College Station 2nd, and College Station 3rd wards. The cities of Bryan-College Station, which cover all of the wards sampled, had a combined population of 170,058 individuals in 2010 (United States Census Bureau 2011). The College Station Texas Stake had a membership of 3,315 individuals as of May 2012. To put that into perspective, Mormons make up roughly 0.019% of population of the cities of Bryan and College Station.

Since the earliest age to have completed full-time missionary service at the time of the project was 21, I used that age as the cutoff point for potential research subjects. The number of individuals who would be old enough to have finished a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was 2,283 or 68.8% of the total Mormon population in the College Station Texas Stake. Of those individuals, there were 436 people who had served as missionaries or roughly 13% of Latter-day Saint population. This number included all active members, inactive members, non-active members, and disfellowshipped members. Those who have decided to have their name removed from the records of the Church, or who were excommunicated by a Church disciplinary council, would not be counted among members of the LDS Church within the geographic area.

The personal face-to-face interviews were much more difficult to get than I expected. I was given access to the congregation lists for the five wards previously listed; the Church was able to provide the number of returned missionaries but not their names. The number of returned missionaries is considered public record; who exactly those returned missionaries are, is not. From these lists, I assigned each household in a congregation a sequential number until I had assigned each household its own unique number. After assigning those numbers, I used a random number generator to provide randomized, non-repeating sets of integers. I then reordered the list based on those numbers. For example, if the original number was 20, and 20 was the 45th number in the random set, then household #20 would be the 45th one that I contacted on the phone to schedule a face-to-face interview. If no one answered the phone, I left a detailed

message with all of my callback information. I called each household three times; after, three attempts with no response, I crossed them off the list and moved on. If the contact information was incomplete—an address might be missing or a phone number might be wrong—I made an attempt to contact each household personally. I spent countless hours driving around both cities trying to locate these returned missionaries. There were a lot of individuals who had no address and a non-working phone number; I crossed them off the list and moved on to the next person. I dropped off my questions and my survey materials at any returned missionary home that would open the door.

Originally, I wanted to conduct 250 hour-long interviews with 50 interviews from each of the five congregations. Just like the surveys, I figured that 250 interviews would provide the widest possible variation for qualitative data while still being a manageable workload. However, I realized halfway through my study that number was not feasible for three reasons. First of all, people were very distrustful of my research intentions. It was hard to convince possible informants that I was not attempting to write an exposé on the Mormon Church and its missionary program. Nearly every person I contacted for an interview asked where I got their name and phone number from. Skepticism about the true nature of my research dissuaded many people from scheduling an interview. Second, despite my efforts to provide ample opportunity to participate, many possible interviewees would not return my phone calls, answer their doors, or accept my printed material. Third, I was simply out of time. It was difficult to find people who were willing to schedule interviews and it was hard to manage multiple schedules in order to have enough time for a real in-depth interview. By the end of the

project, I was able to get 82 interviews or 19% of the total amount of returned missionaries in the College Station Stake (See Appendix B: Table 1). To protect my subjects, I did not record personally identifiable information (beyond basic demographics); in this dissertation, no specific interviewee will ever be designated by name.

At this point, the reader might be wondering why I did not announce I was conducting a research project about Mormonism in our weekly church meetings? Or, why I did not visit each congregation personally so that the local members could connect my name and face to the research, possibly increasing their chances of scheduling an interview with me? The answer is simple: I did not want to bias the results. Early on in the initial research, I decided that I would not play “the Mormon card.” When I contacted anyone for the first time, I introduced myself as an anthropologist from Texas A&M doing a research study on returned Mormon missionaries. However, I did honestly answer any questions and would tell people I was a member of the Church if they asked (which they all did either over the phone, at the interview, or on their doorstep). Essentially, people might be more willing to help a fellow Mormon (or less depending on your current beliefs about the Church); and, when it came down to it, I was more comfortable initially concealing my identity. I did not want to coerce people into helping me just because we have a shared faith.

Two experiences, illustrating the problem of positively or negatively biasing your results, demonstrated the difficulties of being a researcher who had a dual identity. The first situation was with a person who was not friendly to the Church. When I

approached him and said I was a researcher from Texas A&M looking for returned Mormon missionaries to survey, he unleashed a tirade of obscenities. He asked if I was Mormon (I lied and said I wasn't). He said his ex-wife kept putting his name on the Church records which caused well-meaning Mormons to come to his house quite often to encourage him to return to the faith. In no uncertain terms, he said that he wanted to "be left the [explicative] alone by the [explicative] Mormons." I assured him that I could not help him with that problem (which was true) and he told me if I ever saw any Mormons to tell them to take his name off their "[explicative] list." He was a large man and had a crowbar (he was using it to fix an engine in his garage) that he clenched menacingly while talking about the Mormons. As I hurried back to my own vehicle, I decided, on this occasion, that discretion would prevent any possible chance of an accidental trauma wound in the name of anthropological research.

The second experience happened when I knocked on the door of one of my (later) interviewees. I was dressed professionally, and, I was carrying a notebook with my study information, lists of contacts, and maps under my arm. She answered the door by shaking her head through the glass and saying, "We don't want to buy anything!" I tried to yell through the door that I was not a salesman to which she repeated, "No soliciting; we're not interested." Undaunted, I began my prepared speech about being a researcher from Texas A&M looking for returned missionaries to interview. She cracked the door open a bit and said incredulously, "What did you say your name was again?" I repeated my name and she said, "Are you married to a Kelsey Pepper?" I said that I was. Suddenly, the door flew open and she said, "I worked with her at the camp

for Young Women last year. What can I do to help you?” With a big smile she explained that their neighborhood was targeted often by solicitors and she was trying to politely get me off her doorstep. It turned out that both she and her husband had served missions and they were delighted to have me come over later and interview them.

I had multiple offers from those I interviewed to personally recruit research subjects for me. I was given lists of names of other individuals in the wards I could/should talk to. I even had one woman say that it was not fair that I could not reveal my religious orientation when looking for possible research subjects. She was convinced that I was doing important research and that she knew more people would talk to me if they could just know who I was and what I was actually doing. She was the first individual to ask if she could at least tell other potential interviewees that I was not doing anything “bad” and that it would be fun to talk to me. I reluctantly said I could not stop her from talking to other people about who I was or what I was doing as a researcher. She smiled; within weeks, more offers for interviews from her congregation poured in.

I also had help from the Bishops of the various wards. Three of the five Bishops knew me personally and made special announcements to their congregations about my project. They did not endorse the project but merely said I had access to the contact information officially and that it had been approved by the Church generally, and by the leaders locally. I think this was just as much a courtesy to me (although I did not make any requests for an announcement) as it was to stop floods of phone calls to them reporting that someone had stolen Church contact information for nefarious purposes.

One of the Bishops even said, “Give me the names of people you want to interview, and I will make sure it happens.” To maintain my attempts at obtaining a random sample, and because I felt that offer was “cheating”, I never gave him any names.

From the beginning of the project, I chose to interview people using a video camera. I only had one person refuse to be videotaped but he also did not show up for the appointment; so, his refusal to be filmed for research purposes really did not matter much. I decided on film as the medium to record my formal field notes for multiple reasons. One, I wanted to have a real conversation with people. I wanted to sit down, relax, and be able to have a back-and-forth exchange without having to take notes constantly. I felt that I could listen to my interviewees better, formulate more thorough questions off the cuff, and appear more involved in the conversation if I just recorded the interview. Plus, my handwriting leaves something to be desired; I write with block letters and, if I am in a hurry, things can become nearly illegible. Rather than chance losing people’s missionary experiences to my poor penmanship, I decided that filming them was the most viable option. Two, I wanted to be able to capture the non-verbal interactions between the interview itself, the informant, and myself. I wanted to watch body language, facial expressions, and gestures over again when I looked at the interviews. I wanted to capture the things the interviewees said without actually saying them. A smile, tears, interesting cultural tropes, and laughter all came through on the film. In the end, however, that nonverbal data did not impact my analysis as much as I expected. Hopefully, in future projects, I can better master the use of non-verbal information for anthropological research.

The face-to-face interviews were all conducted in a one-on-one setting. As suggested by Bernard (2011), I chose to have the interviews follow a semi-structured format; this method is best employed when the researcher will only have one opportunity to interview an informant. This format also allows the interviewer to maintain discretion to follow new lines of questioning/leads while maintaining control over the interview, allowing flexibility for your informants' answers, and the opportunity to clarify confusing questions (Ibid.). However, this format is easily influenced by the interviewer and did consume most of my research schedule as I had to invest large amounts of time into finding informants, interviewing them, and then reviewing their recorded interviews.

All of the interviews were conducted in one of three locations: the house/office of the informant, my office on the Texas A&M campus, or at my own home. I allowed the participant to decide which option they felt the most comfortable with. Unsurprisingly, most individuals chose to be interviewed in their own home. These interviews lasted anywhere from 35 minutes to 4½ hours; the median interview time was roughly an hour-and-a-half. The face-to-face interviews contained the same demographic questions and the same four questions the online survey had. Additionally, the face-to-face interviews had three open-ended questions. The first question was on the survey already; the other two questions I came up with after the first four interviews. My additional questions were not technically approved (although they were approved after the completion of the project) by the university's research review board at the time of the interviews; but, I felt they were in the right spirit of the project and could not

cause any real trauma. Besides, approved questions should be a springboard for an interchange and not a shackle for the researcher. The two new questions were, “Tell me a funny story from your mission” and, “What do you feel was the greatest life lesson, secular or spiritual, from your mission?” It was very entertaining to hear stories from missionaries around the globe (and share my own with them) and to end the interview with an opportunity to hear about what people felt the mission had truly done for them. In the words of Mormon culture, it was refreshing to hear people bear testimony of deeply spiritual and personal experiences they had with God as a missionary.

After the interviews were over, I re-watched and analyzed the responses of my informants. I took copious notes and organized answers along general themes. Originally, I was going to code responses and determine which answers most appropriately fit in which categories. But, I discovered that an informal grouping allowed for more freedom to pick up the nuances of my informants comments while still creating an organization for comparison. There was no statistical testing performed on any information from the face-to-face interviews; they were analyzed to identify patterns and provide the reasoning behind the responses from the surveys. However, since my understanding of statistical analysis is limited, I employed a statistician to test for correlations between demographic data and the survey responses; he was instrumental in helping me to interpret what exactly people were saying inside the context of the research.

Conclusion

Methods of conducting research change depending on a multitude of complicated factors. In the end, all anthropological research strives to maintain as much scientific quality as possible. As Dewalt et. al. (1998) states,

The “quality” of [ethnography] will vary depending on the personal characteristics of the ethnographers (for example, gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnic affiliation), their training and expertise (for example, language ability, quality of training, etc.), and perhaps their theoretical orientation. As interpretive anthropology makes clear, all of us bring biases, predispositions, and hang-ups to the field with us, and we cannot completely escape these as we view other cultures. Our reporting, however, should attempt to make these biases as explicit as possible so that others may use these in judging our work. What is also apparent, however, is that by utilizing more formal methods of data collection in conjunction with participant observation, we may improve the quality and the consistency of our reporting (288).

The quest to achieve that standard can be difficult; what appears to be a valid and useful method for consistent reporting of our results can work on paper but fail miserably in the field. Despite my best efforts at using formal methods of data collection, I know that happened to me. However, my attempt to use empirically sound methods allowed for as objective a result as possible from a completely subjective population. Looking back

now, would I have designed anything in the research differently? I do not know. But, I do know that the information I got from my informants was as real, and sincere, as possible despite a lack of true participant observation. In the end, my research yielded promising results despite my methodological shortcomings. Sometimes, as anthropologists, our research succeeds despite our inadvertent attempts at messing it up.

CHAPTER VI

DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS: OCCUPATION, AGE, ETHNICITY, AND SEX

Before moving to the chapters containing the hypotheses, I wanted to consider how basic demographic factors—like occupation, age, ethnicity, and sex—impacted the mission experience among the returned Mormon missionaries in my sample. Questions about Mormon missionary identity and the mission experience as a life event had comparable sets of quantitative variables allowing me to evaluate these questions using basic statistics and Chi-Square tests. However, I was unable to conduct the same tests on the third question about the use of folklore by Mormon missionaries in adapting the Gospel message to different cultural contexts. Due to the fact that the demographic data was strictly quantitative and the responses for the third question—which all came from the face-to-face interviews—were strictly qualitative, the statistician I consulted with for the duration of the project suggested that attempting that type of comparative statistical analysis between quantitative and qualitative data would be unwise. Therefore, any statistical analysis on whether occupation, age, ethnicity, or sex have any impact on the use of folklore among Mormon missionaries will not be discussed; the answer to that question will have to wait until a future project where I can design better quantitative metrics for testing that specific hypothesis.

I anticipated that these demographic factors would affect who Mormon missionaries saw as the most influential person inside the mission experience in developing their missionary identity and on how returned Mormon missionaries saw their missions as a life event. However, I turned out to be incorrect. Among my survey

respondents, occupation, age, ethnicity, and sex, had no statistical correlation to who missionaries felt was the most influential person in shaping their identity or how they chose to see a mission as a life event. However, age was correlated to an ancillary question I asked about what returned Mormon missionaries saw as their greatest challenge during their missionary service. The older the returned missionary was the more likely they were to select a cultural challenge (the people, the culture, the language, or the food) over mission challenges (such as the mission president, companions, other mission leaders, or themselves) as being the most trying aspect of their missionary service. To be honest, I was surprised; I thought I had solid grasp of my own culture. On top of that, my missionary experience should have provided me with a more informed emic perspective which, in turn, should have led me to formulate more educated assumptions. These findings then beg the question: what did I misunderstand about my own culture that caused these demographic indicators to not meet my expectations?

The purpose of this chapter will be to dissect these demographic factors and evaluate possible reasons why they were as not predictive of the Mormon missionary experience as I had previously thought.

Occupation

After the initial examination this demographic variable, it was easy to realize where I had inadvertently made an error in my analysis. Using the Bureau of Labor Statistics' list of Standard Occupation Classifications from 2010, the survey respondents were asked to identify one of 23 possible occupational categories that best fit their

current jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). My thought process behind this demographic indicator was simple and based on psychological reasoning: if individuals are drawn toward a certain type of occupation (teacher, doctor, firefighter, etc.) they might have tastes, preferences, and personality traits in common. Moreover, if those tastes and traits existed, could they be used to predict how Mormon missionaries saw certain aspects of their missionary service? In other words, did returned Mormon missionaries' occupational choices indicate a shared predisposition to view their missionary experiences similarly? I anticipated that shared occupational choices might mean that these former missionaries would comparably conceptualize their missionary experiences (See Appendix B: Table 2; Table 3).

The problem with this assumption should be apparent based on the information about the age requirements for missionaries I detailed previously in Chapter III. Mormon missionaries serve their missions at a time in their young lives where occupational decisions have not yet been made. Most Mormon missionaries either have no, or little, college education before serving as missionaries; only in rare occasions, has a prospective Mormon missionary graduated from college or worked in their chosen profession before missionary service. Interestingly, many of my informants talked about how their missionary service later impacted their career choices. Five of my interviewees, after talking about their mission president's occupations, cited their mission president's advice in career choices as key in their current occupational choice. One person was especially stunned by the realization that he probably went into accounting because his highly respected mission president was also an accountant. Most

individuals I spoke with during my interviews thought their missions were times where they unconsciously made career choices. Because they had a different perspective on life and the time to intensively ponder that future decision, many informants felt that their missionary service helped in selecting a future career path. Looking back, I think a more interesting route would have been to ask if where the returned missionary served (wealthy/non-wealthy country, foreign/domestic culture) impacted the selection of their college major or subsequent career choices. Occupation cannot retroactively impact the mission experience; though, the mission itself, and its purposes and structures, can and does impact returned missionary occupational choices. Looking back, this was a poor question to ask. However, it was interesting to see how introspection, the development of talents/skills, and opportunities for personal growth inside the mission create occupational choices for Mormons after the conclusion of their missionary service.

Age

As I talked about in Chapter III, missionary work has changed dramatically over time. The average ages of returned Mormon missionaries in my sample were 35 for the surveys and 36 for the interviews. And, there was a large age range in individuals inside the sample as well; the oldest surveyed individual was 73 while the oldest interviewed was 84. The youngest missionary, in both cases, was 21 (See Appendix B: Table 4; Table 5).

Originally, when the statistician and I looked at results from the Chi-Square tests in regards to age, we found no correlations between age and the major questions of this dissertation. However, as I indicated in the introduction, there was a correlation between

age and the ancillary question of what returned Mormon missionaries saw as their most difficult challenge as a missionary. After finding no correlation between the cultural or mission challenges, and after a little cajoling from my statistician, we batched the final four choices (people, language, culture, food) together as a single variable called “culture challenge”, ran a new Chi-Square test, and discovered that there was, in fact, an actual correlation. The older the individual was the more likely they were to choose one of those cultural challenges as the most difficult aspect of their missionary service (See Appendix B: Table 6; Table 7; Appendix C).

As discussed in Chapter III, there have been substantial changes in Mormon missionary policies and procedures since 1950. Because some of these changes were quite drastic, I anticipated that older individuals might have experiences with missionary structures, teaching programs, or training that substantially impacted how they saw their missionary service. However, like occupation, age is an easily explainable variable. And, I believe the explanation has to do with globalization. As the cultures and economies of the world have become increasingly intertwined, the need for global citizens has pushed education to offer more inter-cultural opportunities (i.e. foreign languages in high school, study-abroad, etc.) to create competitive individuals for the job market. These opportunities for interactions with foreign cultures are more prevalent today than say 50 years ago. Combined with the Americanization of the globe, younger individuals are probably more likely to feel less of a cultural difference with their global peers than the youths of 50 years ago. The other variable, while connected with globalization, is the spread of technology, especially the Internet. At the time of my

mission call, the only way to obtain any information on China was still found on the shelves of my local library. As the Internet has reached more people, and expanded to include international websites with access to cultural practices and cultural data, younger returned missionaries can find out about major cultural traits—and anticipate adaptive problems—much easier than I could in the year 2000.

Ethnicity

This variable was harder to analyze than the previous two demographic factors because ethnicity is inherently more complex. Ethnicity plays a vital part in the development of self-conception and ethnic background can profoundly impact an individual's worldview. For those reasons, I rationalized that Mormon missionaries of various ethnic backgrounds might, despite having a shared faith, view their mission through very different cultural filters. Using the racial categories from the most recent US Census, individuals self-identified their ethnicity during the surveys and in the interviews (U.S. Department of Commerce 2012). Essentially, the ethnic variation of the sample was too small; there were not enough respondents or personal interviews from ethnicities other than White. Of those surveyed, there were only 52 individuals who did not list their ethnicity as White; in the interviews, only 5 individuals indicated that their ethnic group fit a non-White category (See Appendix B: Table 8; Table 9).

Several factors complicated obtaining a more ethnically diverse sample. The first problem was demographic; according to most recent Pew Report on Mormon demography, the racial background of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the United States is 86% White, 3% Black, 7% Hispanic, and 5% other

non-Hispanic (Pond 2009). Since the sample of those surveyed was predominantly from the US—807 or 92% of the surveys—and all of the interviews were with Church members born in the United States, this severely curtailed the ethnic range of data and its interpretation. The second factor that impacted this demographic variable was language. I chose not to have variants of the online survey in foreign languages; there was only one survey and it was entirely in English. Mormon returned missionaries living in other countries, and among different ethnic groups, where English is not a primary language, might have been unable to take the online survey due to language issues; I think the fact that the survey was not translated into multiple languages probably hurt my ability to capture a more ethnically inclusive sample. The third is related to technology. I chose to distribute the survey online through Facebook. Some of my respondents posted the survey link on popular Mormon blogs and other sites of general interest to Latter-day Saints. However, technology has its limits. Not everyone has access to the Internet; and, even if they do, they might not be on the most popular sites where the survey would have been located. This technical fact could have limited the variety of the sample especially when more Mormons now live outside the US than inside it. The fourth factor is time. The survey was live for only roughly six months. I could have allowed it to be active for longer. I do not know if that would have helped me collect more ethnically-varied data; however, based on the ethnic breakdown of my sample, I am not sure having the survey live longer would have made any difference in the long term.

Sex

This was the variable that surprised me the most. Because men and women experience culture differently, due to the cultural weight societies attach to gender, I figured that there had to be some gender correlation among fundamental aspects of Mormon missionary work. In many conversations, both inside this research project and informally over the years, I have asked female members of the Church about their experiences as missionaries (See Appendix B: Table 10; Table 11). To understand how Sisters fit into the larger picture of Mormon missionary work, I need to talk about the positions of power that Sisters can occupy inside the mission experience.

Of the six influential power positions that I was interested in researching, females can only occupy four of those positions: a native, a MTC teacher, a trainer/first companion, or a second companion. Because some positions are occupied only by males holding the Priesthood, such as mission president or any of the other mission leaders, Sisters cannot hold these positions. Therefore, all decisions regarding mission policies were made by males. However, with the very recent increase of Sister missionaries due to the new lower age requirements for all missionaries, the Sisters can now serve on the mission council which is the new governing body inside all missions and as Sister training leaders (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2013). This allows them to have more direct say in the overall affairs of the mission (Ibid.). However, this is an extremely recent policy change and only a handful of those surveyed or interviewed would have been in the mission field to see these changes. Being on the sidelines, not being able to directly influence policy, and sometimes being treated as

second-class citizens (I knew many Elders who were not kind to Sisters because they did not like them on principle), I reasoned that Sisters would have a completely different experience. First, at least until October 2012, there were low amounts of Sisters serving as missionaries; this circumstance would, in practice, give Sister missionaries a less robust variety of potential companions compared to their male counterparts. While the Elders could be paired with about 120 other young men in my mission in Hong Kong, the Sisters could only be prospective companions with about 45 other Sisters. And second, Sisters were only allowed to serve for eighteen months and were only eligible to serve at the age of 21. In comparison to the Elders' twenty-four month service, this temporal restriction on their missionary service meant that the Sisters had six fewer months to learn languages, overcome culture shock, and develop important missionary skills. As a result, I expected fundamental differences in Sisters' perceptions of their service as missionaries because of these restrictions.

Even after I would lead returned Sister missionaries with questions about gender specific problems, I still—for the most part—got a report of their overall mission very much akin to their male counterparts. The purpose of a missionary is to bring other souls to Christ through eternal ordinances and covenants (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2004). However, a missionary's purpose does not include occupying positions of power inside a structured hierarchy. Although there are necessary positions of power and authority inside a mission, they are ancillary to the missionary effort. In other words, they are the means to the end; they are not the ends themselves. Sister missionaries can, like any Elder, participate fully in bringing souls to Christ; Sisters do

not get to run meetings or often be behind closed doors but, with the drastic increase of Sister missionaries, that is changing. However, they get to accomplish their missionary purpose and that is one of the reasons why I believe Sisters—despite what I originally thought—have mission experiences that are very similar to the Elders.

Additionally, the fact that the mission hierarchy and most power positions are male oriented is not a surprise to females. While some females who are recent converts might not know that Sisters traditionally had no official titles inside the mission structure, most Mormons are aware that the mission is run—like any program in the Church—by the authority of an all-male Priesthood. In other words, the Sisters understand the Priesthood administration of the Church’s missionary program and are willing to work inside that pre-existing restriction. They want to serve the Lord and to accomplish the work of salvation regardless of gender representation; these spiritually-oriented mindsets might have offset any gender biases I thought would be present in the experience of Sister missionaries. Alternatively, it could be argued that being a male could have biased my results or my interpretation of this variable. Returned Sister missionaries might be more willing to discuss the gender differences among missionaries more openly with a female researcher. Although there was no sense of hesitation on the part my female informants to share their honest opinions about gender inside their missionary experiences, the acknowledgement that gender-bias could have played a role in these results is important to make.

Native vs. Non-Native Mission

In closing, questions about impact that the type of missionary service—native or non-native—have on the Mormon missionary experience might have arisen in the mind of the reader. Aside from the first hypotheses, which had a component about native and non-native missionary service, I did not conduct any additional statistical tests about the influence a foreign mission might have over a domestic mission on a Mormon missionary. Quite simply, my research was not interested in those possible correlations beyond the limits of the first hypotheses.

However, I was surprised to learn that returned Mormon missionaries—when asked about which culture was more difficult to adjust to: Mormon missionary culture or the culture of the mission area—indicated that the adjustment to life as a missionary was far more challenging than the culture of the people they were serving (See Appendix B: Table 12; Table 13). Especially with missionaries who serve in non-native cultures, I anticipated that the cultural structures of Mormonism that exist inside the mission experience would be comforting to missionaries and provide a sense of familiarity and security (See Appendix B: Table 14; Table 15; Table 16; Table 17). However, I can posit two reasons why Mormon missionary culture might be the more difficult adjustment to make. First, Mormon missionaries believe that their call to missionary service is divinely inspired; in other words, God has specifically called them to labor as missionaries in a specific place and with a specific culture. It is possible that this spiritual imperative helps Mormon missionaries to minimize cultural differences, or even feel a divine push to quickly come to terms with them, in a unique way. Second, the

rigors of being a missionary, especially the connection of personal self-esteem to how “good” of a missionary one is, could impact how hard the transition into being a Mormon missionary truly can be. Additionally, when a missionary sees other less-committed missionaries, that realization might create a cultural disjunction with ideal Mormon missionary behavior and serve as a source of irritation in an already highly stressful environment.

Future Research

A few areas of future research about these demographic topics might be interesting to pursue. First, research specifically targeting non-White ethnic groups among returned Mormon missionaries is drastically needed; a more thorough research project to identify former missionaries among these ethnic groups could aid in understanding how ethnicity interacts with the development of Mormon missionary identity and if different ethnic groups look at the missionary experience, in terms of a life event, with vastly altered perspectives.

Second, research that examines issues of globalization and the Internet in more thorough detail—especially inside the greater population of older returned Mormon missionaries—could be a very fruitful way of examining how age impacts missionary identity, acculturation, and cultural perceptions. I also suggest a longitudinal study of a handful of individual missions; this could provide for a fresh look on how missions—as cultural entities themselves—change over time in regards to missionary structures, habits, and teaching techniques.

Last, a project directed specifically at Sister missionaries as a unique missionary sub-cultural group could yield a confirmation, or refutation, of my ideas about how Sisters view their missionary experience. It would be especially interesting to examine the changing dynamics of mission leadership as Sisters take a more active role on the newly formed mission councils. Evaluating the impacts those councils have on Sister missionaries, and how the mission councils facilitate improved coordination and working relationships between Elders and Sisters, could provide further information on gender interactions inside the Mormon mission experience.

Conclusion

The demographic indicators of sex, ethnicity, occupation and age had no statistical correlation on who missionaries thought was the most influential person in helping them form their missionary identity or on how they saw their mission as a life event. However, the age of a returned missionary did have a direct correlation on what type of challenge, cultural or mission, they perceived as the most significant problem they encountered as a missionary. Finally, although tangentially related to this dissertation, returned Mormon missionaries had a harder time adjusting to Mormon missionary culture—by a 3:1 ratio—than they did adjusting to the culture of their mission area. This finding suggests that the culture shock, and acculturation, of Mormon missionary culture was more dramatic than I originally had anticipated.

As fascinating as the implications of these demographic analyses are in an ethnographic evaluation of Mormon missionaries, I finally turn to an examination how

the three major hypotheses of this dissertation help to increase the anthropological understanding of Mormon missionaries.

CHAPTER VII

MAKING A MORMON MISSIONARY: A STUDY OF MORMON MISSIONARY

IDENTITY

My mission president, Donald Hinton, had a profound impact on my missionary service. As a young man, he had served in Hong Kong for a short time before being airlifted out by helicopter, at least from what I remember, because of major civil unrest in the city. He was an excellent public speaker; his previous occupation as a professor of communications undoubtedly helped him refine that skill. He was also a deeply spiritual man; I felt that he sincerely cared about me and my success as a missionary. Although I did not spend a lot of time with him personally, because the demands of 180 missionaries make it impossible for one person to spend quality time with any single missionary, I did have opportunities to work with him closely on occasion. Because of his great love for Hong Kong and his love of history, he tried to impart to us the importance of what we were doing as missionaries and why we were there. I remember when we first arrived, President Hinton took us to the top of Victoria Peak on Hong Kong Island and read the dedicatory prayer of China; he told us that our individual missions had impacts that would extend far beyond the two years of our missionary service. I looked up to him; and, I wanted to be the best missionary I could because of his trust in me.

My trainer/first companion, on the other hand, also had an important role in the development of my missionary identity. Chad Rasmussen hailed from Sandy, Utah and had a style of missionary work all his own. He was extremely caring, he always tried to

make sure I was comfortable—and uncomfortable—at the right times, and he tried to push me to really think about my purpose as a missionary. In fact, after a very long day and an even longer list of complaints, he made me memorize a poem that I still remember: As a rule, man's a fool/ When it's hot, he wants it cool/ Always wanting what it's not/ Never happy with what he's got. He told me I needed to learn to be happy with what I had in life and to look for the good things happening all around me. Later, when I became a trainer/first companion myself, I made my new missionary memorize the exact same poem. His missionary style, his love for the Chinese, and his hardworking attitude seeped into my missionary work. His influence on me was inescapable.

In this chapter, I am interested in examining the question of the development of Mormon missionary identity. The purpose of this chapter is to find out whom, if anyone, inside the Mormon missionary experience is the most influential on missionaries' cultural perceptions, style, and identity. Since the experience of being a missionary is so unique and all-encompassing, we need to examine who has the power to shape the experience. In other words, what type of power—formal, chance/circumstantial, or cultural/indigenous—is most responsible for the formation of a Mormon missionary's self-conception?

The Terms

Before beginning, I need to operationalize the terms “power”, “authority”, and “identity.” Power can be conceptualized in multiple different ways. It can be at least two or more persons who at a given time can be arranged, or who can arrange

themselves, along a hierarchy with a dichotomy of leader/follower and dominator/dominated (Doob 1983). A variant definition can be a relationship where one person presents another person with an offer to which is attached a contingency in the form of reward, or promise, or of a penalty or threat (Ibid.). It can also be asymmetrical control over resources in physical, economic, or social areas (Russell and Fiske 2010). Although some aspects of these definitions could certainly be used to discuss power in the Mormon missionary experience, none of those definitions fit well with the social/structural organization of power I observed as a missionary or, more importantly, from the descriptions I received from any of my informants of power relationships inside their missions. The best definition that I have encountered that encapsulates the concept of power in a Mormon mission deals with influence. So, for the purposes of this dissertation power is defined as the potential to influence others in psychologically meaningful ways (Guinote and Vescio 2010). Even though this definition is extremely broad, I feel that it most closely captures the interplay of power and identity inside a Mormon mission. Since most of missionary work is driven by the individual missionary, the power to influence the psychological meaning of what a missionary is has significant impacts on the self-esteem, work ethic, and wellbeing of a missionary. These things, in turn, help crystalize identity.

Authority, especially since it can be de-coupled from the concept of power, needs to be discussed briefly. And, as seen in Chapter II, authority—at least in a theological sense—is extremely important to Mormons. Authority is often discussed as a form of legitimate power or institutionalized power (Doob 1983). However, “charismatic

authority”, a term coined Max Weber, closely describes what most of my informants talked about experiencing as missionaries (Scott 2001). This type of authority transcends mundane institutions and focuses on the extraordinary or the supernatural for legitimacy. In conjunction with charismatic authority, there is a depersonalized charisma, called “office charisma”, which occurs when there is charismatic influence connected to a formal position of traditional, or bureaucratic, authority (Ibid.). Since some positions inside the mission experience are formal positions, which carry with them supernatural authority to receive revelation for subordinates, office charisma is an important aspect of the Mormon missionary experience.

Founded on the work of Erik Erikson, identity is a sticky concept to define. Initially, Erickson was concerned with the meanings—both individual and social—that human beings bring to identity especially as seen in the relationships between individuals and society at large (Kaplan and Flum 2012). Expanding on those early ideas, identity researchers have defined identity as, “the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is” (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith 2011, 69). They can be a “meaning-making lens” that “focus[es] one’s attention on some but not other features of [their] immediate context[s]” (Ibid.). Identity is also connected with place and time. Since identity is formed through the cultural materials and natural environments around individuals and societies, it can be highly plastic in relation to geography (Fry and Lewis 2008). Identity is also temporally oriented; it can be what focused on the past (what I used to be), the present (what I am now), or the future (what I want or do not want to become) (Oyserman, Elmore and

Smith 2011). In a metaphysical sense, identity can be thought of as belief systems that bind people physically, spiritually, and emotionally (Fry and Lewis 2008). Broadly put, identities are the mental concepts, social products, and forces of action that shape human behavior (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith 2011). Since Mormon missions are inherently place and time specific, and connected to deeply held spiritual belief systems, these aspects of identity become crucial in understanding the phenomena. On a final note, self-concept—or what I think about myself when asked about my identity—is also a key idea in identity studies. The part of the self-concept that is fundamental to the formation of Mormon missionary identity is the idea of “role identity.” Role identities function as a juxtaposed identity that solidifies the self-concept, and identity, of another individual. Simply put, a person cannot be a believer/missionary without someone else who is an unbeliever/potential proselyte (Ibid.). In the end, I defined identity to my informants as what “it meant to be a missionary” which, although being a more existential view of identity, the returned Mormon missionary community I worked with easily understood.

Positions of power exist inside any organization; and, Mormon missionary life is no exception. Broadly speaking, I would classify three types of authority that exist inside the Mormon mission structure. The first type would be formal authority. These individuals are easily recognizable as having direct and clear religious callings inside the mission. They are recognized by missionaries as a divinely-appointed leader with specific ecclesiastical responsibilities and powers. In the mission field, those individuals would be the mission president, the district/zone leaders, and the trainer/first companion. The second type would be chance/circumstantial authority. These are individuals who

have authority that derives from randomized associations with missionaries but without any specific delineated religious authority. In the mission field, those individuals would be the second companion and the MTC teachers. The final type would be cultural/indigenous authority. This type of authority is connected to individuals who have special knowledge of the geographic, social, political, linguistic, or historical climate of an area attached with growing up in, or with, that culture. These various positions of power and authority interplay and create different opportunities for the development of identity among Mormon missionaries and led directly into the formation of my first hypothesis.

The Hypothesis

On the survey and in the face-to-face interviews, I asked the respondents to rank six individuals on how important they were in helping form an understanding of the culture the respondent served in and in developing their identity, and style, as a Mormon missionary. This question was designed to test the following hypothesis:

Null 1: Mormon missionaries create their identity independently of any other individual inside the mission structure; therefore, no single individual is the most important in developing that identity.

Alternate 1A: Mormon missionaries serving in a culture that is native will actively see their mission president as the person most responsible for their missionary identity.

Alternate 1B: Mormon missionaries serving in a culture that is non-native will actively see their trainer/first companion as the person most responsible for their missionary identity.

Before I get to the justifications for these hypotheses, the categories of native and non-native need to be quickly discussed. For the purpose of this dissertation, I chose to define native and non-native cultures by matching missionaries' country of origin with the missionaries' country of service (See Appendix B: Table 18; Table 19). If the missionary was from Japan and served in Japan, then they were categorized in the native culture group; if the missionary was from Japan and served in South Africa, then they were categorized in the non-native culture group. While there can be vast differences in cultures and ethnic groups across entire countries, I felt confident that an individual who was from America and who served in America would have a cultural lexicon that was basically compatible with other Americans; however, an American serving in Russia would have to acquire a fresh cultural lexicon to achieve compatibility with Russians. After meeting with my statistician, this method appeared as the simplest way to organize the data for later empirical testing. The list of possible countries for the survey respondents came from the US State Department's List of Independent States (U.S. State Department 2013).

Based on my personal experience as a missionary, I anticipated that if the missionary served in a culture they considered as native, the mission president would be the most influential person in developing their identity inside the mission structure. The

reasoning behind that premise was that since there was not an abrupt cultural difference, defined as the rift between the missionaries “existing internal cultural competencies and those required in his or her new host environment”, the mission president would be able to more directly influence who the person felt they became as a missionary (Shaules 2007, 22). These individuals would already be closer to the ethnorelative side (acceptance, adaptation, integration) of Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, because of the shared cultural context, and more likely to see the mission president as a key figure in helping them form their identity inside a familiar cultural system (Ibid.). One informant described this concept when he said that the same movies and music he was listening to before he went into the Missionary Training Center were still playing when he came out three weeks later. To him, it felt like he had taken a short vacation and then came “back home”; there was no cultural difference/disconnect, in his mind, aside from the adjustment/shock of being missionary.

Alternatively, if a missionary served in a culture that was considered non-native, there would be profound cultural difference/disconnect. This confusion, and the subsequent muddling through new cultural mores, would push the trainer/first companion to the forefront of importance in identity formation among Mormon missionaries. Because the trainer/first companion would be the original cultural lens through which the inexperienced missionary orients themselves to a new culture, their influence would be paramount in creating Mormon missionary identity.

One issue that cropped up from time-to-time in the face-to-face interviews would be that individuals would want to rank these choices separately: they had different

people that they felt were more important in teaching culture but who did not have an impact on their style of missionary work/identity and vice versa. I will admit I had never thought of that possibility; although, it makes sense inside the context of the hypothesis to rank individuals separately because of the way the actual question was worded. I allowed the respondents the freedom to decide if they wanted to rank them separately. Of the 82 interviews I conducted, I only had three individuals provide me with rankings for this question across those two separate metrics. For the sake of simplicity, those who took the online survey were not allowed to rank individuals separately.

Positions of Influence

In the following sections, I have taken the descriptions of the mission president, the trainer, and the district/zone leaders directly from the *Mission President's Handbook* since those are official positions inside the mission structure (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2006). The descriptions of the second companion, MTC teacher, and native companion, because of their quasi-official natures, are based on my personal research and experience as a former Mormon missionary. I have organized this section with the formal positions first, the chance/circumstantial positions second, and the cultural/indigenous position last.

The Mission President

Mission presidents are married men who take their wives and children with them into their assigned mission area. They are called by the Lord through the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. They put their professional lives on

hold to serve or can be retired; they are given a minimal stipend to live on while serving and can supplement their income with their own personal savings.

The mission president has five distinct responsibilities as described in the Mission President's Handbook. The first responsibility is as a husband and father. He is charged with ensuring that his family is taken care of physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually. One of his paramount concerns is to make his term as a mission president a positive experience for his family (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2006). The second is as a missionary themselves. Although they preside over the mission, they can engage in any of the proselyting activities of the Elders or the Sisters; they carry the official calling as formal missionaries for the Church. Unlike the missionaries in their charge, mission presidents have a term of service of three years. The third responsibility is as a teacher and trainer. They are responsible for all of the training the missionaries receive; that training comes from the *Missionary Handbook*, the scriptures, and *Preach My Gospel*. They can train missionaries through personal interviews, through teaching in zone conferences, or by personally teaching and proselyting with them. The fourth is as a counselor and judge. They are responsible for helping the missionaries to be successful in their work and to take care of their needs; additionally, they can administer affairs in the local branches when there are not enough members, measured by the amount of Melchizedek priesthood holders within a specific geographic boundary, to organize a ward. Finally, they are the main administrators of their mission and handle day-to-day operations. However, most of these responsibilities are delegated to missionaries who are assigned to serve in the Mission Home (Ibid.).

Overall, the mission presidents are the leaders of all significant aspects of missionary life (See Appendix B: Table 20).

District/Zone Leaders

District and zone leaders are missionary leaders at a more localized level. A district is comprised of two to four proselyting areas or roughly four to eight missionaries; a zone is made up of three to five districts or approximately 18 to 24 missionaries (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2006). The zone leaders have the responsibilities of conducting companionship exchanges (mainly with the district leaders), visiting district meetings to offer support to the missionaries and district leaders, and supervising monthly missionary training in zone conferences.

The district leader is responsible to set an example for missionaries of effective missionary work including carrying a full proselyting load, having personal scripture/gospel study, working hard, being obedient, and other missionary skills. He is responsible for serving the missionaries of his district and inspiring them through strengthening their faith. They are directly responsible for conducting weekly training meetings and going on exchanges with other missionaries to work one-on-one with individuals and their companionships. They interview candidates for baptism, look after the wellbeing of the missionaries (especially the Sisters), make sure that relationships between the Elders and Sisters are in harmony with missionary standards, follow up on referrals given to the missionaries, and demonstrate effective planning to the missionaries under their stewardship. These two missionary callings, the district leader

and the zone leader, form the backbone of mission leadership according to official missionary policy.

Because missionary work is a responsibility of the Priesthood, Sister missionaries are not called as district or zone leaders; specific zones or districts of only Sisters are also not allowed (Ibid.).

The Trainer/First Companion

The trainer/first companion is a formal role demanding special trust. The trainer/first companion is the first foray into real mission life and “will have a profound, lasting influence on the development of the missionary’s attitude and habits” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2006, 48). Trainers/first companions, like mission presidents, have five distinct roles inside the mission. First, they are to commit themselves to the highest standards of obedience and do everything possible to help new missionaries have a positive experience. Second, they are supposed to help new missionaries adapt to the rigors of missionary life especially focusing on schedule, the *Missionary Handbook*, and the mission rules. Third, they are responsible for calling companionship study every day to help the new missionary improve on their current proselyting techniques and to build new missionary skills. Fourth, trainers/first companions need to demonstrate how to plan—both daily and weekly—for effective missionary work and demonstrate how to help investigators to move toward conversion. And finally, they are responsible for helping new missionaries participate in the work of teaching as an equal partner despite language, cultural, or personality difficulties the new missionary might have (Ibid.). Trainers/first companions do not have to be seasoned

missionaries, although most are. The trainers/first companions become the gateway into the life of a missionary and the first foray into a new culture.

The MTC Teacher

Now, I turn to the chance/circumstantial positions inside the mission experience. Before heading to their official mission assignment, missionaries attend one of the 15 Missionary Training Centers across the globe to learn missionary skills and to receive formal language training. While at the MTC, the MTC teachers are the primary individuals that instruct new missionaries. These teachers are returned missionaries who are in good standing with the Church; they are paid instructors and do not hold official religious callings inside the mission structure (Brigham Young University 2011). Their main function is to help the missionaries achieve their missionary purpose which is to, “invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2004, 1). Teachers at the MTC spend their time with the missionaries providing instruction, direction, counsel, feedback, and training using *Preach My Gospel* and the approved curriculum, directing missionaries in planning and accounting for their learning, and preparing personally to meet the missionaries daily needs (Brigham Young University 2011). MTC teachers will spend anywhere from 3-12 weeks with missionaries, depending on the amount of language training required for the mission. Missionaries who are called to missions where they already have a command of the language tend to stay at the MTC for three weeks where they practice teaching and

polish missionary skills; missionaries learning a foreign language generally stay at the MTC for roughly 8-12 weeks depending on the difficulty of the language. More difficult languages, like Cantonese for example, required the missionaries to have 12 weeks of intensive linguistic training before departing to Hong Kong.

The Second Companion

The second companion is the companion who the new missionary has directly after they have finished their training with their trainer/first companion. The second companion should, in theory, continue with the same level of obedience as the trainer, be just as interested in furthering the missionary skills of the companionship, and in helping the missionary to further adapt to the culture while providing opportunities to more fully engage in the work by allowing them to teach more. However, they might have a vastly different approach to being a missionary than the trainer/first companion; therefore, they can serve as a foil and provide a new perspective on how to engage in missionary work. Since, like trainers/first companions, the second companion is chosen by revelation, they could be any appropriate missionary inside the mission. Per the *Mission President's Handbook*, there are no special skills or requirements needed to be assigned as a second companion (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2006).

The Native Companion

Last, I conclude with the cultural/indigenous position of authority inside the mission experience. The native companion is any missionary who is a cultural expert. They could have been born in the mission, have lived there for an extensive amount of time, or otherwise have unique cultural information attached to the geographic mission

area. Since missionaries have multiple companions of the course of their mission—I personally had thirteen different companions—a native companion can simultaneously occupy the roles of trainer/first companion or second companion. Additionally, they might also fit either of the aforementioned roles while concurrently serving in the mission leadership as a district leader or zone leader.

The Results

After running a Chi-Square test on the survey responses to determine if there was a correlation between the most influential individual and the type of culture (native/non-native) that the missionary served in, there were some interesting and unexpected results (See Appendix B: Table 21; Table 22). First, I determined that regardless of whether a missionary serves in their native culture or in a non-native culture that the trainer/first companion is actually the most influential individual inside the mission experience. Therefore, my alternate hypothesis 1A was not supported; missionaries who serve inside their native cultures do not categorize their mission president as the most influential individual in providing cultural understanding or missionary identity. However, alternate hypothesis 1B was supported; missionaries who serve in non-native cultures categorize their trainers/first companions as being the most influential in providing cultural context and building missionary identity. However, if a missionary served in a non-native culture, the mission president was just as likely as the native companion to have the most influence on missionary identity. Additionally, the individuals inside the mission experience least likely to be influential across both native and non-native missions were district and zone leaders. Personally speaking, those results were

surprising. Using the responses from the face-to-face interviews, I want to examine these findings in greater detail to determine possible factors that impacted the results.

I will discuss and illustrate three patterns about mission president's influence that became apparent during my interviews; geographic size of the mission itself, personality of the mission president, and having multiple mission presidents during the mission experience, all affected the mission president's impact on missionaries. The first pattern, geographic size of the mission, seemed to be the most common answer as to why the mission president could have a very high, or very low, level of influence on the missionaries. I spoke with many individuals who told me that, at the time of their missionary service, they had served in either the geographically smallest, or largest, mission in the world. Several individuals told me that their mission president was over six hours away from them at any given time (one person who served in Russia had a mission president that was 18 hours away by train). So, it would make sense that geographic proximity would mean greater availability/access; missionaries who had a mission president close by, or who had a small geographic mission, would have more interaction with the mission president potentially leading to an overall higher influence and greater impact on missionary identity. But, it could be argued that familiarity breeds contempt as well; thus, missionaries who had a smaller mission could have more chance for negative interactions with their mission president potentially also impacting missionary identity in harmful ways. Among the missionaries I encountered, I heard both sentiments expressed.

The second trend was the personality of the mission president himself. On the negative side, some mission presidents had either a leadership style or a personality trait that their missionaries simply did not like. Many missionaries reported that their mission presidents ran the missions as businesses, with autocratic authority focused on smooth day-to-day operations, or possessed other administrative quirks that irked them. Others said that their mission presidents did not listen to the concerns voiced in their personal interviews, took sides in arguments among missionaries, had missionaries that they favored over others, or chastised/punished disobedient missionaries in ways they felt were inappropriate for the level of missionary misbehavior. Some missionaries complained that their mission president was not easy to get to know personally or that, for whatever reason, they were not close to him. However, interestingly, all the individuals who indicated they wanted a closer relationship with their mission president said that the lack of a close relationship was a major regret of their mission; no person I interviewed said that they did not actively try to be emotionally close to their mission president. On the positive side, many individuals spoke of their mission president as instrumental in helping them develop greater spiritual understanding, self-confidence, and sincere love for the people they served and missionary work in general. Three individuals said that their mission presidents stopped them from quitting as missionaries and essentially saved their missions from ending early due to personal discouragement. Some presidents were theological powerhouses distilling Gospel doctrine to the missionaries; others presidents were incredibly caring and bordered on family to many individuals I spoke with.

The third pattern was a missionary having multiple mission presidents during their mission experience. Since mission presidents only serve for terms of three years, it is possible for a missionary to start their service with one mission president and end with a new mission president. My wife's first mission president was only responsible for the mission for five months before completing his service; her second mission president was with her for the remaining ten months of her mission. Like my wife, some individuals had only one mission president, others had two. Changing mission presidents, and leadership styles, during the mission could have impacted missionaries' choice to rank their presidents higher or lower; many informants said that they liked their first president, or felt closer to him, but did not feel the same way about their second president. This sentiment could have inadvertently caused a lower ranking for the mission president overall if a missionary had two presidents but could not choose—in either the survey or the face-to-face interview—to decouple individuals inside the “mission president” option. Additionally, several individuals initially reported not liking their mission president. In these cases, it was a change on the missionaries' part that pushed the mission president higher in terms of influence on their missionary identity. Personal hardships, powerful spiritual experiences, or a better understanding of the purposes of missionary work, caused the missionaries to reevaluate their feelings which drastically improved their relationships with their mission presidents. Organizational changes inside the mission experience also impacted the mission president's influence. Many of those I interviewed said that as they moved into positions inside mission leadership or into the mission office, their opinion of the president changed dramatically.

In that respect, changes in missionary assignments, or the shared hardships and experiences that come with working together closely, could move the president in the minds of the missionaries to being more or less influential on their missionary identity. Despite the positives and negatives associated with each of these three patterns, the mission president was classified as the second most influential individual inside the mission structure in identity formation across both native and non-native mission experiences.

The trainers/first companions shared some similar patterns with mission presidents; there were personality issues and differences in leadership styles that bothered some missionaries. However, the biggest negative issue with the trainers/first companions was that they either did not fit the “ideal missionary” envisioned by the newer, younger missionary or were exhausted and ready to go home. Many respondents spoke at length about how the MTC creates a culture of missionary work that is unrealistic; that prevailing cultural expectation is extremely powerful and it generates friction between the new recruit and the veteran trainer/first companion. The trainer/first companion only appears like a “bad missionary” because they do not fit the MTC-created expectation of what a “good missionary” is. To the chagrin of many of my interviewees, they admitted that their overzealous behavior—and not the trainers/first companions themselves—were the actual problem that colored the whole situation. Some trainers/first companions were just lazy; they simply refused to do any type of missionary work. Others were flagrantly breaking missionary rules. Numerous informants spoke about their trainers/first companions being a “good example” of what a

missionary should not be which then caused the new missionary to deeply evaluate what their standards of missionary work would become. One informant said that, because he did not understand the language or the culture of Venezuela, his trainer basically stole his missionary support funds and used them for his own personal comfort. Many interviewees reported having trainers/first companions that did not allow them opportunities to teach because of their initial limited language abilities. Some individuals discussed how they hated their trainers/first companions initially because they would not prevent the new missionary from making cultural mistakes or help them out of culturally difficult situations; however, all of these respondents said that they later came to appreciate the attempts their trainers/first companions had made at letting them learn from their mistakes despite their embarrassment.

On the positive side, many informants told me how much they loved their trainers/first companions and that they had helped the new missionary establish important missionary habits. Commonalities between beloved trainers/first companions included being empathetic to the struggles of missionary work, being loving and supportive of mistakes, and actively teaching new missionaries the tricks of the trade. One individual spoke at length about how the trainer/first companion is the first cultural lens you have into both missionary work and the culture of your geographic mission; he felt that you could not overestimate the importance they play in your missionary experience. Many of my informants had trainers/first companions that were also district or zone leaders in the mission at the time of their assignment as trainer/first companion; many felt that their trainers/first companions being a district leader or zone leader gave

them opportunities to see good missionary work at more than just a localized level, and provided them with a vision of unified missionary work from an organizational standpoint. Even people who disagreed with their trainer's/first companion's methods felt that they were an overall positive influence. In the end, the trainer's/first companion's impact on missionary identity was fundamental by either influencing the missionary to become like them or to work hard to escape their example of poor missionary work.

The second companions had unique challenges. First of all, if a missionary had a bad trainer/first companion, a second companion who was willing to follow missionary standards more closely was a welcome change. Many individuals who had a poor experience with their trainers/first companions cited their second companions as their real "trainer." Conversely, many of my informants went from an excellent trainer/first companion to a poor second companion. These were usually people who had initially disliked their trainers/first companions and then come to appreciate them later after seeing that missionary work could take on drastic changes in form and structure based on personality. One individual talked at length about his theory regarding second companions. He thought missionaries either had a really good trainer/first companion or a really good second companion. But, new missionaries could only make that decision about who was really the better missionary when they were presented with two different styles of missionary work. He said that seeing two options of missionary work would cause missionaries to gravitate toward one style and reject the other especially if there were deeper personal problems with their companion. In the interviews, I found that

sentiment was shared by many other returned missionaries. Some of the interviewees I talked to had unique experiences with their second companions. A few of the informants were in missions where they became a senior companion immediately after being trained which is an extreme oddity. This unusual shift in position caused an inversion of the missionary norm with the second companion, who is usually the senior companion, now placed into the junior, subordinate role in the companionship. Others had their trainers/first companions transferred away and a new companion sent into their area—which was the case with me—and this created an opportunity for the junior new missionary to exercise more control in the companionship because of their familiarity with the members, investigators, and their proselyting area thus limiting the more traditional influence that a second companion could have, in terms of leadership and localized knowledge of the proselyting area, on missionary identity.

The MTC teachers had various impacts on missionaries. Those who ranked them highly did so for a couple of reasons. People I interviewed often talked about a MTC teacher giving them the confidence to complete their mission. One informant was on the verge of going home from his mission early because he felt that the language and the rigorous demands of obedience were too much for him. His MTC teacher, who was a former missionary and a really “neat” individual, expressed confidence in this missionary’s future; my informant told me that he thought if his MTC teacher could honorably serve a mission then so could he. He decided to stay and credits that teacher with saving his mission. Other individuals talked about having either native teachers or teachers who had served in their missions. These teachers made the mission feel more

real, provided insider information about the mission culture to the new missionaries, and helped them acclimate to cultural changes more completely. One individual had a MTC teacher who had just returned from the same mission he was going to, knew the mission president well, and was an excellent missionary. He talked about how that combination had a profound impact on the way the informant perceived the mission, sending him off to the mission field with an increased respect for his future mission president. Most respondents who reported that their MTC teachers had little impact felt that the time with them was too short. One informant called the MTC the “baby pool” and said that it could never actually prepare missionaries for the real mission field. Many others echoed similar sentiments coupled with the idea that the MTC and the mission field have very different types of expectations and conceptions of what a “good” missionary should be. Many informants had teachers who had no connection with the mission culture or area aside from a shared language; this limited their ability to influence missionary identity. Two good examples of this problem were among missionaries called to speak either English or Spanish. Although Spanish is spoken in Spain and Mexico, the nuances of languages, not to mention the cultures, vastly differ. If the MTC teacher happened to serve in Mexico, as did one of the teachers of one of my informants, they cannot provide a clear picture of missionary work in Spain. This linguistic disconnect meant that the language, while an important aspect of missionary identity according to many of my informants, would eventually be overridden by the greater cultural identity the missionary gained from living in their assigned mission.

Native companions were the most difficult category for many of my respondents who served in both native and non-native contexts. First, the native companion could simultaneously be a trainer/first companion, second companion, district leader, or zone leader. Many informants I spoke with had a native companion who also filled one of those roles inside the mission; however, it seemed that the designation as a native companion seemed to take the backseat to the trainer/first companion or second companion in the hierarchy of influence on identity among the missionaries I interviewed. I got a myriad of complex responses. Individuals would tell me that they had all native companions (they tended to be Americans who served in the United States), or that they would lump all of their native companions together (these tended to be in Central and South America), or that they had someone who was not actually a full-time missionary but were called as mini-missionaries who they considered as a native companion (these tended to be in Europe and Asia). These mini-missionaries were called from local congregations, were generally assigned as missionaries for three to six weeks, and were either young males above the age of 16 or recently returned missionaries. In the case of the young males, many of my informants told me that their call as a mini-missionary was to help them make the choice to later go on a full-time mission. Second, many respondents said that they did not have a native companion. Generally, I was told, there were not many native missionaries assigned to serve as missionaries in their home countries; this condition extremely limited the opportunity of serving with a native companion and their potential to impact identity.

Having a native companion—out of all the categories considered—had the strongest responses both positive and negative. On the positive side, many former missionaries cited a boost in language ability that gave them further confidence after they were paired with a native companion. Several missionaries said that the native companions went out of their way to protect them and helped them gently move into ambiguous cultural areas with ease. One individual I spoke with is a business partner with his former companion, an Elder from Mexico, and remains strong friends with him to this day. However, on the negative side, language also proved to be a barrier that led to a lot of friction between companions with some hostilities even becoming physical. Many informants said that their native companions would belittle them; one Sister, who served in Argentina, spoke of how her native companion refused to let her teach and, in one discussion, apologized to their investigator for her companion's poor Spanish and subpar teaching skills. It was interesting to note my informants generally considered language as the deciding factor in whether one of their companions could be considered a “native” or not. For example, I was asked if a companion who spoke Spanish from Mexico City could be considered as a “native” companion in Antofagasta, Chile. I allowed my informants to make that distinction; invariably, every informant who was in a similar situation would categorize their native companions as “native” if they spoke the mission language indicating that language was the main determinant as to whether another missionary was a native or not.

The ranking of the district leader/zone leader as the least influential position in the development of identity was somewhat surprising. These individuals are formal

leaders who are in respected power positions in the mission and often handle the day-to-day problems that arise in missionary work. Nearly all of the individuals I spoke with in my face-to-face interviews said that these Elders had extremely limited opportunity to influence their identity as missionaries despite their formal power. Those who reported them as significant had them attached to either being a trainer/first companion or a second companion. There were notable exceptions though. Three individuals talked about having extremely poor trainers/first companions. In all of those situations, the district leaders and zone leaders took extra time to work with that companionship, teaching the new missionary coping techniques—like how to make a local dish as comfort food— and by going on exchanges with them to provide an outlet to get back to missionary work. In these cases, the district leaders and zone leaders were ranked only second to the mission president in influence on missionary identity. Almost all of the individuals I interviewed simply could not remember the names or faces of their district/zone leaders. They could remember important lessons that they learned but felt that proximity to other missionaries, especially companions, made a more significant impact in forming their missionary identity.

Finally, I want to discuss other persons or groups that individuals noted as more influential but who were not categories on either the survey or in the face-to-face interviews. Although this chapter is interested in power positions, and their influence on missionary identity, that exist inside the mission structure itself, I feel that these alternate options demonstrate that missions are a deeply personal experience that can be somewhat hard to quantify. Four individuals who served as missionaries stated that their

family was the most influential in helping them decide what it meant to be missionary and on their identity as a missionary. Two of these individuals were older (over 60) and had actually served with members of their extended families as companions. In these cases, both of those companions were first cousins and both companions were from Utah. For these informants, serving with those family members connected their service back to their home and pushed them to reevaluate what the purpose of a missionary, and missionary work, was. The other two spoke of the examples of other returned missionaries in their families, particularly their fathers (and in one of the cases his mother as well), as the most important person in influencing their identity as a missionary. One individual I spoke with said that the members of the Church in his second proselyting area had the most profound impact on his identity; they had high expectations of missionaries and would help the missionaries out in developing their understanding of the culture around them. A couple of individuals cited their MTC group—the fellow missionaries who attended the MTC at the same time with them—as creating a group consciousness that carried over into the work of the individual missionaries conception of identity. This deep connection provided a way to look back to a time of shared struggle and helped wayward missionaries who had deviated from the group’s expectations of a “good missionary” to have an in-mission support group to help them refocus on missionary work. Many individuals who had a variant answer simply wanted to choose a different companion as the most influential person to shape their missionary identity; these missionaries had companions beyond the trainer/first companion and second companion that they could mark as pivotal in their conception of

missionary identity. The most common reason missionaries wanted to choose other companions as most influential? These companions came after a particularly trying companion or at an important, introspective time in their missionary work where their impact on identity was magnified.

Future Research

Over the course of this dissertation, questions arose that would be fascinating to evaluate in the future in regards to this hypothesis. First, I would like to attempt to tease out the reasons why many individuals seemed to use language as the organizational choice for choosing which companions were “native” and which companions were not. Beyond the human inclination to connect language with the ability to navigate a foreign culture effectively, I am at a loss as to the reasoning behind this assumption. Further study among returned Mormon missionaries evaluating this trend could provide new avenues in the evaluation of Mormon cultural conceptions of “natives” among missionaries.

Second, I think it would be interesting to discuss Mormon missionary identity on various social levels beyond just the formation of that identity inside the mission experience itself. I am certain that missionary “identity” can exist within various ethnic/geographic communities of Latter-day Saints in different forms. While the core of what makes a missionary would be similar, the examination of the concept of missionary identity among those groups could yield fruitful results. Beyond that, it could be easily argued that the identity of a Mormon missionary could be examined at the Church-wide, mission, or family levels; however, that type of analysis was beyond

the scope of this dissertation and needs to be thought out more fully before any type of research could be formally organized.

Third, it would be stimulating to conduct new research on Mormon missionary identity among senior missionaries. As the fieldwork proceeded, I had two individuals that I interviewed that did not conform to my line of reasoning: senior missionaries. Senior missionaries are retired individuals who serve as missionaries after their children have grown up and moved away. These missionaries generally serve in humanitarian positions related to their former professions or as support staff in the Mission Home. Even though I did not intend it, my question into Mormon missionary identity carried the hidden assumption that I would be examining identity among individuals who had served as missionaries at a young age. Senior missionaries do not really fit this hypothetical model well for two reasons: 1) they have only one companion—their spouse—and 2) they usually do not attend the MTC with the same rigorous schedule or intensive language training as the younger missionaries. Since their companion for the entirety of the missionary experience is their spouse, they do not have trainers/first companions, second companions, or native companions; their lack of an MTC experience also eliminates the MTC teacher as a possible influence on missionary identity. Additionally, since they are older, often have extensive Church service, and have possibly served as missionaries when they were younger, their missionary identity might be more complicated and be drawn from their previous missionary experience instead of forming while they are serving as senior missionaries. In the end, I felt any

questions about senior missionaries were better saved for another time where greater in-depth analysis could be performed.

Conclusion

To conclude, hypothesis 1A was not supported; missionaries who served in their native cultures did not see their mission president as the most influential individual in helping them gain cultural understanding or in constructing their missionary identity despite missionaries having little/no cultural difference between their indigenous and mission cultures. In fact, the mission president and/or a native companion were equally likely to be influential on forming missionary cultural understanding and identity. The greatest limiting factors on each role having a significant impact on missionaries were geographic proximity to the mission president and availability/possibility of native companions within the mission experience.

Hypothesis 1B, on the other hand, was supported; missionaries who served in non-native cultures saw their trainer/first companion as the significant person in in forming Mormon missionary identity and understanding of the culture. Additionally, regardless of where the missionary served—in a native or non-native culture—the trainer/first companion was the most influential person in establishing cultural understanding and creating missionary identity. This is probably because trainers/first companions serve an important function of easing into missionary culture and the geographic/ethnic culture of the mission by providing a bastion of safety in a vital transitory time.

Out of all possible positions of influence, the formal authority positions had the highest impact on missionary identity due to the importance of the trainer/first companion. However, the formal authority position of district/zone leader was extremely limited in the impact on identity with most former missionaries unable to recall faces, or names, of these leaders. Chance, or circumstantial, authority positions—the second companion and the MTC teacher—appeared to have the least amount of influence in developing cultural understanding or missionary identity.

In the end, missionary identity—like any identity—is a complex mixture of people, place, time, and culture. And while these identities are the fingerprints of individual missionary efforts, further study into how these self-conceptions of what a missionary is, especially before a missionary is even called, could shed more light on the intriguing process of becoming a Mormon missionary.

CHAPTER VIII

“DURING MY MISSION”: A STUDY OF THE MORMON MISSION EXPERIENCE

AS A LIFE EVENT

Do you remember your first kiss? Mine was in the fall of 1997; I was a junior in high school. At the time, my girlfriend was my debate partner. We went into my garage to get something for my mother when I sensed the time had come. I asked to kiss her; of course, she said yes. And, there I was about to cross a threshold into a brave new world. Years of sitcom television and print media had told me that this moment was going to mark my end of boyhood and my start of being a real man. I expected fireworks, an angelic chorus, or a transcendental moment where I became “one” with manhood. But, nothing dramatic happened. We kissed. We smiled at each other. We held hands and walked back into the house. More importantly, I did not feel any different. I did not become the pinnacle of manhood I thought would instantly transform into after lip contact with a girl. Granted, it was a mutual first kiss; it was sweet, gentle, and nice. But, it was not the rite of passage I had been lead to believe it would be.

Rites of passage are complicated things. All cultures have some way of marking off important times of change in life. Going to kindergarten, getting a driver’s license, finding your first job, and purchasing your first home are some of the rites of passage that spring to mind from American culture. The question I want to answer in this chapter, though, is: how do Mormons view their missionary service as a life event? Is the choice to serve a mission—where a missionary gives up their entire life for roughly two years—so complex an experience that it goes beyond the concept of a rite of

passage? Is the missionary experience far more profound, or not? Through my research, I think it is necessary to evaluate the Mormon missionary experience in new terms: I think that the mission is not a rite of passage; rather, I suggest that it is a self-contained life.

In this chapter, I am interested in examining the question of how former Mormon missionaries see their missions as a life event. Do former missionaries really view their missions as a self-contained life or are the classic anthropological concepts of a liminal phase, rite of passage, or initiation better categories to place the Mormon mission experience in?

The Terms

To begin analyzing if the missionary experience is a self-contained life or not, an explanation of a rite of passages is required. Two individuals essentially founded the studies of rites of passage inside anthropology: the French folklorist, Arnold van Gennep, and the English anthropologist, Victor Turner. Focusing on how individuals move from separation, to transition/margin, and finally to re/incorporation, van Gennep was interested in examining how societies are structurally reproduced through their uses of ritual (Stewart and Strathern 2014). Van Gennep was especially interested in the concept of liminality—the state between statuses—inside the larger picture of a rite of passage which he discussed in his most famous work entitled *Rites of Passage* (van Gennep 1960). Liminality, however, is not a word often heard in modern English. Meaning “a threshold” in Latin, liminality essentially signifies that an individual is not one thing and they are not another; they exist in the middle of two social statuses. To

grasp the concept of liminality, think back to the time after graduation from high school. In my case, even though I was going to BYU as a new freshman in the fall, I was no longer a high school student and I was not really a college student yet either; it was a summer in limbo. No one expected me to go get a full time job and start my career, or to get married, or even to move out of my parent's house. The social rules for maturity did not apply to me the same way as they apply to me now; I was exempt from the expectations of adult life because of my in-between status. Even though this is a simple example, these liminal stages exist all around us and are necessary for partitioning important events that change individual's statuses in society and within our own cultural groups.

Expanding the work of van Gennep, Victor Turner enhanced the concept of liminality by focusing more exclusively on the stage of liminality itself. Moving beyond the three-part conception of liminality van Gennep described of preliminary/separation, liminality/margin, and postliminary/incorporation, Turner formulated liminality as a nuanced place packed with personal and social meanings. In his seminal work, *The Ritual Process*, Turner expounds on the between and betwixt state of individuals during liminal periods (Turner 1969). He dissects liminality to explain the sectioned spaces of rites of passage where individuals are outside of society and not yet reincorporated into it. He marks the differences between liminality and the normal state with binary divisions (equality/inequality, absence of status/status, silence/speech, etc.) to categorize the stark contrasts between the two (Ibid.).

As stated earlier, however, I posit that Mormon mission experiences do not fit neatly into either category. Rites of passage tend to mark important times in cultures such as birth, death, or graduation. In other words, they are social indicators of status changes. This dissertation, though, is interested in how Mormon missionaries understand their missions as life events. To be clear, life events are measured and delineated by rites of passage; they are the status changes themselves. Missions, because of their importance inside Mormonism, cannot exist solely as social indicators of status. Since the function of a mission is, on some level, about a creating a changed individual through service to God, it must be examined as a life event. However, the categorization of the mission as a life event does not mean that—at least in the minds of those who have served—a mission is not a rite of passage, a liminal phase, or an initiation. What it does mean is that the mission can be easily shoehorned into these concepts. Without scrutinizing the mission beyond the practical functions of proselyting or gaining converts, a full understanding of the vital role the mission experience plays inside of Mormon culture is lost. Disentangling this complex relationship, however, was not a simple task.

The Hypothesis

On the survey and in the face-to-face interviews, I asked the respondents to choose between five different statements to describe how they felt about their missionary service. This question was designed to test the following hypothesis:

Null 2: Mormon missionaries do not categorize their missionary service as rite of passage, liminal phase, initiation, or a self-contained life

Alternate 2: Mormon missionaries categorize their mission as a self-contained life.

In a religious sense, Mormon missions can function as liminal states where individuals are separated from their former lives, enter the sacred calling/state of missionary, and then, after being released, are returned to a secular normal/real life (Stewart and Strathern 2014). Mormon missionaries do have a profound spiritual boundary that separates them from the general membership of the Church. Despite that boundary being intangible, there is a cultural understanding among Mormons about the mission as sacred space with clearly delineated limits. Missionary dress/uniform could be seen as a general physical indicator of the initiate especially in regards to the iconic black name tags missionaries always wear. Additionally, missionaries undergo a name change while serving—Kevin Pepper Jr. became Elder Pepper—which is a vital part of the creation of a new identity especially inside rites of passage (Ibid.). And whereas other religions might have more permanently visible physical changes that affect those who have gone through the initiation rites, after the completion of missionary service there are no outward manifestations of the “returned missionary”; it is an invisible social status even among faithful Mormons. More importantly, while the performance of ordinances could certainly be labeled as rites of passage or changes of state in Mormonism, missions do not function the same way. While missionary service is a

profound change of state, it is completely optional exercise in securing the goal of Mormonism: joy and eternal life. In other words, all important ordinances must be completed to gain exaltation but whether or not an individual is a returned missionary has no theological impact on their chances to gain an eternal reward.

My own experiences as a former missionary, as well as the aforementioned ways of looking at a Mormon mission from an anthropological standpoint, form the foundation of this hypothesis. Missionary life was, and still is, something completely different than anything else I have ever done. It was a phase in my life where I measured things completely differently than any other time. My self-concept was not measured by how good my grades were, how much money I was making, or whether or not I had a girlfriend. It was measured by how exactly obedient I was to missionary standards and rules, how focused I was on serving others, and if I was using every minute of the experience to open my mouth and share the Gospel with the people of Hong Kong. Before I served, I measured time in years and weeks. As a missionary, I measured time in hours (how long do we need to contact on the street today?), months (how long have I been here and how long do I have left?) and missionary transfers (how long have I been with my companion or how many companions have I had?). Growth was not measured by finals, physique, or finances; it was painstakingly analyzed in those quiet moments where I wondered if I was becoming the person God wanted me to be and whether I was truly internalizing the Atonement of Jesus Christ. And, I do not think I was alone in these measurements either. Missionaries all around me were talking

about, teaching about, and thinking about these same metrics for being a good missionary.

It cannot be denied that Mormon missionary experiences are formative or that there are aspects of a classical rite of passage built into them. Are there religious or other socio-cultural expectations to serve with status change involved? Of course there are; an individual moves from being a lay member to a returned missionary with all the charged cultural meanings that designation holds for Latter-day Saints. Is a Mormon missionary experience a social rite of intensification? Yes; there is definite reinforcement of an ideological faith-based position that articulates the theological worldview of Mormonism. Aspects of a rite of passage are built into being a Mormon missionary; in fact, many of the individuals I spoke with used this specific term to process their feelings about their mission as a life event. But, the mission is much more than just an event that changes an individual's status in Mormonism from member to returned missionary. A mission is a completely separate time that, while connected to time before and after, is unique in a Mormon's life trajectory.

However, I think it goes farther than that. I think it is a self-contained life within a life; it is a pocketed space that exists out of time yet comprises the middle part of a three-part life. Ask a Mormon returned missionary to talk about their mission. Somewhere in their narrative, they will most likely say something like "before my mission" or "after my mission" especially when asking them to examine their mission in relation to their life as a whole. If they start the sentence with "during my mission", they are going to tell a story from their mission that has important lessons/consequences for

their life today. While the narrative will certainly be understandable, there will be a sense of being left out—at some fundamental level—among those individuals who are not returned missionaries. As Rodney Stark (2005) correctly observes, “Much as their common experience once bound together Americans who had served in the armed forces (an experience that cuts across age differences and cuts out nonveterans), so does the mission experience provide a common cultural currency for Latter-day Saints” (129). This cultural currency is only part of the *communitas* that a mission creates (Turner 1969). My hypothesis is that former Mormon missionaries will see their missions as being far deeper than a social or intensified rite of passage or cultural currency; they will place their missionary experience within this categorization of a self-contained life.

The Results

The results of this hypothesis were respectively close (See Appendix B: Table 23; Table 24). However, there was still a clear preference in the answers. One in three of the survey respondents chose to classify their missionary experience as a self-contained time where progress, growth, and time were measured completely differently than any other time in their life. Using the responses from my face-to-face informants, I will examine the other choices and tease apart their answers to illuminate the rationale behind being able to accept hypothesis two—that former Mormon missionaries view their missions as a self-contained life—as probable.

The first choice—a time where you moved from one stage to another more important stage—dealt with stages of life and asked if respondents felt as if they moved from one stage in life to another more important stage via the missionary experience.

Did informants feel as if they were in a completely different stage or moving through a rite of passage? Many of the informants I interviewed felt that was an appropriate way to describe their mission and defined the concept of “stage” very differently than I had anticipated. First, many interviewees said that they went from being a youth to an adult which they saw as a new stage of life. While returned missionaries definitely carry cultural weight inside Mormonism in terms of the child/adult dichotomy, most individuals spoke of their change in more secular, or practical, terms. They learned how to take care of themselves, do laundry, balance a bank account, eat healthy, and deal with adult problems beyond their limited adolescent experiences. Second, my informants talked about going from a college environment, or from their home, to the mission field as a new stage; they felt that the missionary rules and structure radically altered the “normal” life of a teenager. Coupled with this concept, these individuals saw the mission as a stage for the development of general maturity or as a preparation for life after missionary service. On a more spiritual note, a few interviewees took the idea of a stage as a metaphysical concept. Nearly all the informants detailed a shift in priorities from being selfish (or self-interested) to selfless during their time as a missionary; from this standpoint, the mission was a stage of being where the dedication of one’s entire life to the service of other people was a transcendent state that moved far beyond the secular and profane cares of everyday life. Finally, many interviewees saw missionary work as an important stage then but as a less important stage now. It was, for most individuals, the culmination of years of preparation that gave them the opportunity for further physical, spiritual, and mental change.

The second choice—a time of transition between other important life events—dealt with asking respondents if they felt missionary work was a transition time between other life events. In essence, was a mission a middle period that served as a bridge between one's former and future lives or a liminal phase? The concept of a mission as a transitory state did not feel right to many of the informants I spoke to. Most of those interviewees who replied that the mission definitely was not a transition stated that the mission was its “own thing”, that it was a life event, or that it had strictly defined boundaries. The nebulous aspects of transition did not quite fit what they saw as a deliberate and important time of life. Out of the nine returned missionaries who mentioned looking at the mission as a time of transition, there were only four former missionaries who said that a transitory time was the most accurate term to describe their experience; two of them, in fact, connected their answer with some aspects of the mission as a stage. The first informant talked about how the transition time was actually about his schooling; he said that the mission taught him how to really study. These newfound study skills became invaluable later when he returned home and attended college. For him, the transition time meant that he was not a good student before his mission and that he became a much better student after serving a mission. The other individual who felt the experience was a transition was a recent convert when he left to serve his mission. Having joined the church in his late teens, he felt that he grew to understand the Church—and its doctrines and structure—much better. To him, the mission set the stage for a more meaningful attachment to his new faith. Interestingly, he referred to the mission experience as a sequestered time where he was cut off from

family, friends, and his past life. The remaining two informants I spoke to indicated that, in their minds, this transition was closely related to a classic rite of passage. Both said that they changed dramatically as a result of their service; one returned missionary said that he came back home so changed that it made his family and friends extremely uncomfortable. He had served in Romania and was in a culture that was much more touch-oriented than America. Laughing, he stated that his expanded sense of touch lead to many awkward social interactions when he came back home especially among members of his immediate family. The final interviewee said that he went from being a punk, arrogant kid to a level-headed, more humble adult. Having never been away from home before, he learned how to tackle major life problems more effectively. He spoke at length about how there was no expectation to do adult things (go to college, get a job, get married, etc.) before the mission experience. He talked about having no anxiety going into his mission; he felt ready, and prepared, for that transition. On the other hand, he said, upon leaving his mission that he was extremely anxious because expectations would shift dramatically.

The third choice—a time where you had greater respect, or responsibility, inside your religion—dealt with the concept of status change. Dealing with the concept of initiation, did those individuals who served a mission feel like they had greater respect, or responsibility, inside their religion while serving as missionaries? This is the question that confused the informants I interviewed the most (and probably confused my survey respondents as well). A quick reading of the question makes it appear to ask if, as a missionary, an individual developed a greater respect for their religion. There were four

individuals who interpreted the question along that line of reasoning; they talked about how they learned to more deeply appreciate the religious teachings of Mormonism, particularly the Atonement of Jesus Christ, during their missionary service. Rather than correct them, I let them evaluate their mission experience with their altered reading of the question. I figured there was no need to embarrass honest people who were sharing their most intimate spiritual experiences with me. As a note, those who felt this way talked about living the Gospel in a fuller context than at any other time of their life; missionary life created new applications for scriptural teachings under complex, real-world circumstances.

When I break down the remaining responses to this question from the interviews, two tendencies emerge. The first is connected to missionaries who served in countries where the Church is still young. These missionaries were often called upon to serve in local leadership—a very unique situation for a 19 year-old—and to run the Church inside their missions. One returned missionary talked about organizing a branch in Brazil; after meeting the membership requirements, they were finally able to get official supplies and manuals from Church headquarters. When the missionaries arrived home after a long day, their front door was blocked by a large stack of boxes. After getting the 30 boxes in their apartment, they started to unbox lesson manuals and administrative handbooks. He said it was at that moment that he realized his responsibility was far greater, in the local congregation, than he ever imagined. So, at least for a couple of missionaries I spoke to, they were actually given religious responsibilities far beyond the expectations for normal missionaries.

The second thread deals with churches as community institutions with social impacts that overreached their intended personal religious impacts. Connected with the issue discussed in the above paragraph, these individuals grew up with the Church as more of a cultural institution than a religious one. One returned missionary who served in Germany talked about how his family went to church because everyone else did and that they were not particularly faithful adherents to Mormonism. Because of this, his mission was an experience during which he learned to have more respect for the religious teachings he had grown up with and came to better understand the attendant responsibilities associated with being a committed believer. A different individual compared a mission to the life of Jesus Christ saying that he felt the people he served with in South America treated him with great respect; they saw him as sacrificing his life in full-time service to God and that the colonial Christian culture of the area valued that dedication. He said he also began to internalize that esteem; he talked about the mission being as close to the living the life of Jesus Christ as any believer could get and that there was something respectable about that effort.

The fourth choice from the surveys—none of these describe how I felt about my missionary service—essentially served as a catch-all category. During the interviews, if an informant chose this answer, I would ask them to describe how they felt about their missionary service as a life event. The answers I received were greatly varied in detail. There were 12 individuals who opted for this choice; and, they were very adamant in their views about their missionary service. One returned missionary who served in El Salvador talked about how it was an eye-opening experience because of the poverty that

he saw all around him; it drove him to see how other people around the world actually live and expanded his cultural understanding. Another individual, whose mission was in Russia, talked about it being a training camp for the Lord; he felt that the missionary experience was designed to take the raw materials of a young man and transform them into an effective tool in the “Hands of the Lord.” Missionary service created a space where he did not have to worry about anything, another returned missionary said. The normal problems of life disappeared and he was able to see reality for what it really is. He said it was one of the most important things he could have done with his life and that he was happy he had gotten the chance to serve. One Sister returned missionary, who served in Puerto Rico and Barbados, had a hard time putting her experience into words—she said that it was difficult to describe what it felt like to have to put her faith on the line. She talked about the challenge of going into people’s homes to lovingly share with them what she knew is true. Alternatively, she shared that seeing the changes in people, as the message the missionaries share takes hold in their lives, is a beautiful experience. An individual who served in Canada felt that it was a time of great clarity where he filled in the gaps concerning his Gospel knowledge; he felt that it built his testimony and that he developed a greater ability to talk to strangers. Another returned missionary, who served in Utah, talked about how the mission was a time to learn valuable leadership skills to use in the world around you. He was able to make practical connections between the type of leadership style he was supposed to develop as a missionary and how to lead groups of people in the real world. He especially enjoyed the opportunity to see the administrative structure of the Church firsthand and to see how

those principles of organization could be duplicated in other institutions that he would later be a part of at Texas A&M. One informant focused on the motif of time. Having served in Nevada, he felt that the mission was a coming of age that focused on learning to appreciate the time he had and to give that time willingly in the service of other people throughout his life. Another returned missionary, who served in Brazil, indicated that the mission experience was a good break from school. The mission provided him with good study and personal habits that carried over into his life afterward. He talked a lot about having a unique, introspective time where he could evaluate his life and safely make decisions about the future without the fear of making mistakes. A different interviewee saw the mission as a chapter of life in a book. Serving in San Antonio, he talked about how he had everything in his life lead up to it and how it is the chapter that everything good in his life had been built on since. The last individual, who served in Argentina, described how he was independent in a way he never was before. He referred to it as a “time apart” where he was focused purely on doing missionary work. He said that a result of that focused lifestyle was that he matured faster than he otherwise would have if he had chosen not to serve a mission. He said that the mission created a sense of urgency; he needed to improve his character quickly, he indicated, because he would never have dedicated time for religious service like this ever again. He needed to make the most of this opportunity for deep personal growth.

At this point, I come to the fifth choice—a time that is self-contained with different ways of measuring progress, time, and growth. The missionary experience is incredibly rich and complex; but, it is also an excised time where missionaries interact

with reality in a way that is completely different than any other time. At least, that was my experience in Hong Kong, the survey results reflect that sentiment, and many of those I interviewed felt the same way. But, before turning to the analysis, I wanted to share a common experience that I had during the interviews. Since most people are naturally curious, many individuals I spoke to wanted to know what I was hoping to get from the research or “what I wanted to prove.” I told them, if they were interested, that I would explain my reasoning in detail after we had concluded the interview so as not to accidentally influence their answers. After the interviews were over, I would explain what I thought the concept of a self-contained time meant in relation to the Mormon missionary experience. Numerous individuals said that if they had known what my definition of “self-contained” was then they would have chosen that option. On the surface, it appears that the concept itself was sound even though the semantic choices I made to describe the concept were not. After hearing my explanation, twelve informants asked if they could change their answers; politely, I refused. I said that I wanted their understanding of the question to color their answer; but, I informed them that I would take note of their revised position regarding this question. While I am positive many informants, both online and in-person, chose this answer because it fit the mission experience best, I am confident that many more individuals would have chosen it if I had used clearer language or explained the concept more fully. In short, this question taught me to be incredibly careful with my wording in future research projects.

Those informants who described the mission as a self-contained time talked about it in different ways than I anticipated; I expected they would evaluate their

experiences as a missionary with similar perspectives on progress (how “effective” missionary work is measured), time (how missionaries are obsessed with the passage of time), and growth (how spiritual and mental change occur) inside a self-contained, or dedicated, period of life. However, individuals took what I hypothesized in completely different, yet compatible, directions. And while this small set of informants surely does not represent the exact feelings of everyone who answered this way, I felt they captured a good sense of shared sentiments along multiple dimensions of meaning. The first interviewee talked about how he went from living the Gospel standards before his mission to becoming an embodiment of the Gospel. He said that, as a missionary, he found that the expectation now was for him to become a walking example of everything the Church stood for. To him, being a missionary was like being a “completely different person” who existed in a new sphere in reality. Additionally, this caused him to mature rapidly as he walked the fine line between maturity and immaturity; this nebulous time caused him to develop a new sense of responsibility both personally and interpersonally.

Two individuals portrayed the mission as a “bubble.” The first informant was very terse and said that it was just a two-year bubble in life. He said that the nature of the mission is such that you really do not look at it before—even though you might plan on doing it—and you do not really look at it after—even though its effects find their way into your life. While he said that he has certainly taken things out of it, and that he grew up a lot inside it, yet he still felt it existed in a different time in his life that felt out of context. The second informant talked about how he felt his mission was like “diving into a bubble.” He said that he was excited about missionary work and that he quickly

adjusted to the new metrics for being a successful missionary. He talked about missionaries measuring success based on how hard they worked to help their investigators and that their investigator's lives meshed with the missionaries as they focused solely on other people. He talked about diligently preparing for the mission and trying to make it the most effective time he could.

One returned missionary talked about being in a pocketed time in regards to missions. He said that after a few months, missionaries begin to lose touch with the outside world as the cares, concerns, and rules of the mission become paramount in this new life. Eventually, those two years become your life, he said. He spoke at length about how the mission is "a different world"; and he sometimes feels like it was a different person who had that experience—not him. Many returned missionaries I have talked too, including myself, felt this way. The same informant defined it not as a life-within-a-life but as a "life-from-life" in the sense that he had a completely separate missionary life only connected to his current life by memories. He talked about not really being associated with a family and that he was not really a kid or adult; yet, missionaries have a lot of responsibility. He detailed the mission as a crucible for thought. Before the mission, he did not think much about his post-mission life. But, he said, missionaries have to come home and start thinking very seriously about major decisions (school, marriage, and career) that were not important as a missionary. Before his mission, he was wrapped up in his own little world; afterwards, he felt that he was in a better position to consider these more global life decisions with maturity.

Within the same theme of a self-contained time, many other returned missionaries focused on the theme of time itself. One returned missionary talked about it being a time separated from everything else in life where he was completely dedicated to only one thing. He contrasted this with normal life where there is a constant pull in different, sometimes opposite, directions. Another informant talked about how the mission seemed so different than any other time of his life. He actually jokingly referred to the mission mindset as “here is how life is in missionary world” as if the mission experience was on another planet or existed in a twisted parallel to normal life. He talked about the difficulty of going back to “real” life and how he had to relearn new rules for social interaction and for application of the Gospel to a secular lifestyle. He referred to the mission experience as being a completely separate time where he viewed the world through a completely different lens. Another interviewee spoke of how the focused dedication of the mission created a completely different life. His dedication to the message, and to missionary work, completely changed his direction professionally and solidified positive changes in his personality. He developed a lot of transferable skills that have helped in other areas of life; he stated that, to this day, he still draws new skills from his experience as a missionary. A mission is different than regular life, said another informant, and that it seemed like a dream. He categorized it as a “suspended spot” where he had a thoroughly distinctive lifestyle in comparison to his pre-mission lifestyle. This suspension, he felt, allowed him to grow in ways he would have never have grown otherwise because of the protected nature of the mission structure. One returned missionary talked about how the mission was just a time-frame for him. He

said that while many of the other options applied, he felt that the fifth choice was perfectly worded—a time of extreme growth, self-discovery and a self-contained time. Another individual echoed those sentiments by labeling his mission as a time “set apart” where his understanding and depth of religious conviction increased. He talked about how he can fondly look back at those memories and see much good and growth in the experience. Another informant spoke about how the mission was more impactful than any other time of his life. He said that it would be better if Mormons labeled it as its own unique period of time. He said he focused on deep spiritual learning during which he was better able to gauge his progression as a person. After his mission, he felt that he had a more difficult time measuring his personal growth. He also talked about how it was a time where he was the most effective learner he had ever been, especially in finding ways to improve himself. He said that the mission was life “lived in the moment”; he was constantly reevaluating himself and his identity, he said, and was extremely focused on the here-and-now instead of the long term. He also spoke about the problems with time; to him, the passage of time was different as a missionary. The two years of service as a missionary felt slow overall; however, he stated that his months of service in specific cities in the mission seemed extremely quick. He closed by saying that it did feel like a different life and that the experience of a mission felt like it was “an eternity away.”

A few individuals who opted for the fifth choice detailed the mission as a dual time; that is, a time for the missionaries’ personal growth that simultaneously belongs to God’s service. One returned missionary I interviewed said that the mission was a time

of progress and growth. Going even further, he said that it is a time for missionaries to experience massive personal growth while also giving that time fully to the Lord. He called it “the most selfish and the most serving time of life”; the juxtaposition between being interested in the development of his character with the simultaneous focus on helping others, in his mind, was a unique situation that he has never experienced since. In agreement with that concept, a returned Sister missionary said that it was growing experience for her. She was desperately trying to improve herself and her missionary work. She was in a mission that was difficult and needed some extra help. After praying with a desire to focus more missionary work and to better teach the German people she was working with, she was injured the next day in an accident while proselyting and was immediately sent home from her mission early on medical release. She talked about how that was a traumatic experience but that it demonstrated that the mission belongs to the Lord and that His timetable and plan for her life did not include continued growth inside the mission experience. Another returned mission experienced more growth than he had ever thought possible in such a short amount of time. Because he had not gone to college yet, it was his first time away from home. He termed the mission as an “incubated two years” during which he did not have to worry about anything other than serving others and sharing the message. He said that the mission thoroughly changed him from “the very inside all the way out.” He realized he was there to teach people hope and help out in any way he could with the time the Lord had given to him as a missionary.

Several informants cast the mission experience as a unique time. One returned missionary talked about how it was a time of singular importance in his life. He said, up until he finished his service, that the mission was the climax of his life. In a melancholy tone, he said that he would like to think about his mission more often; he thought the lessons he learned and the person he was should carry over more fully into his practical day-to-day life now. One returned missionary succinctly said that the other options did not apply. He felt that he was dedicated to serving and that commitment to missionary service came from a personal sense of duty. Another interviewee talked about how the mission dramatically, and permanently, altered his understanding of missionary work. To him, the mission was a unique time because it changed him so completely that he served as a missionary, and now as a lay member in the Church, in a fundamentally different way than he would if he was not able to serve. Another returned missionary spoke about the mission giving him a real tangible purpose in life. Though his life has purpose now, he felt that the singular purpose of missionary work fostered a situation where he grew into a new person with transferable skills that could be used in the real world. Many informants I talked to made the distinction between the “real world” and the “mission.” One returned missionary, sharing the sentiment of the mission as dreamlike, said it was this strange capsule of life where everything is completely different than the “real world.” His examples dealt with things that he felt were really important in mission life (like waking up every day at 6:30 or not hugging the opposite sex) but were not necessarily important before, or after, his service. All of these

perspectives combine to create an interesting picture of missionary work as a self-contained time for many returned Mormon missionaries.

Future Research

In a later project, I would like to retest this hypothesis after reworking the question, and the possible responses, to make them clearer to the respondents. Based on my responses from the face-to-face interviews, I believe that the survey responses and interviews would have been drastically different if I had been able to more clearly explain my theoretical construct for this question better. And while I have doubts about the complete validity of my results, I am confident that the responses from my face-to-face interviews indicate a trend that demonstrates tentative support for my hypothesis. Additionally, I would like to attempt this same study with missionaries in a longitudinal manner. I would like to follow a small group of missionaries and interview them regarding this topic before, during, and after their missions to see if there is any change in the how they view the mission as a life event. Finally, a comparison between siblings who served from the same family would be interesting to undertake to examine if the categorization of the mission as a self-contained life has any correlation with a missionary's family of origin and/or that family's individual conception of the mission as a family event or expectation.

Conclusion

The Mormon missionary experience, as a life event, is extremely complex. After examining why I felt a rite of passage or rite of social intensification did not quite fit the Mormon missionary experience, I discovered my second hypothesis was initially

supported. One returned missionary out of three felt that a self-contained life was the best way to adequately describe their missionary experience as a life event.

However, I also found that, just as there are different missions with different missionaries, that individual experiences are wildly personal. All returned Mormon missionaries conceptualize their missions as a formative time in their life with special, and sacred, meaning to them both before they served and after the completion of their missionary service. To truly examine the missionary experience as a self-contained life, I think a better metric is needed to capture the psychological aspects of this hypothesis; sadly, that type of deep psycho-analysis is far beyond my training in anthropology. For now, these superficial answers are the best indicators of a greater trend of thought among returned Mormon missionaries as to how they see their missions as a life event and the new concept of a self-contained life to describe the reality of missionary service among LDS individuals.

CHAPTER IX

TRANSPLANTING THE GOSPEL: A STUDY OF THE USE OF FOLKLORE IN MORMON MISSIONARY TEACHING

I am an amateur numismatist. I am not quite sure where that part of me comes from. My dad loves collecting stamps; so, maybe I have genetic predisposition toward collecting bric-a-brac. And, while my father loves stamps, I am fascinated by the shape, size, usage, and history of coins. I especially have a fondness for the two-dollar coin from Hong Kong. On one side of the coin is a beautiful etching of the same flower graces the Hong Kong flag: the Bauhinia. On the reverse side of the coin, there is a giant stylized number two. But, the most interesting characteristic of the coin is its shape. The reeded edge of the coin is ridged; this ridging creates a stunning star shape that makes the coin unique among the currency of Hong Kong. I have many fond memories of using that coin as an important teaching tool as a missionary.

As the number of Mormon missions has steadily increased since 1831, Mormon missionaries have continued to encounter new cultures. Although the Church has a divine mandate to spread the Gospel, missionary work among new cultures can prove difficult especially when Mormon doctrine does not interact well with local customs. The question of how to adapt a religious message to a new cultural context is not new nor is it limited only to Mormons; in fact, the question of inculturation—or how a religion adapts itself to indigenous areas—has been around since the early Catholic Church. However, Mormon missionaries do not have the freedom to alter Church positions or policies to fit better with local cultural circumstances. The purpose of this

chapter, then, is to examine if, and how, Mormon missionaries make use of folklore and folk culture to make the Mormon message more palatable to the other cultures, religions, and ethnic groups they encounter every day.

“An Ancient Tradition-Steeped People”

My missionary experience was full of teaching techniques that the missionaries had refined for nearly fifty years. The most effective techniques, though, were ones that tapped into Chinese—especially Hong Kong—culture. They were real life, practical examples that only people in Hong Kong would understand properly. Thirty years before the formal organization of the missionary work in China, Elder David O. McKay, of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, dedicated the land of China for the Work of the Lord. From a small grove inside the Forbidden City in Beijing, he officially opened the country to missionary work and used priesthood authority to unlock the blessings of the Gospel for the people of China. Upon our arrival in Hong Kong, my mission president read the missionaries that prayer which included a paragraph I felt was especially poignant:

May the elders and sisters whom Thou shalt call to this land as missionaries have keen insight into the mental and spiritual state of the Chinese mind. Give them special power and ability to approach this people in such manner as will make the proper appeal to them. We beseech thee, O God, to reveal to Thy servants the best methods to adopt and the best plans to follow in establishing Thy work among this ancient tradition-steeped people. May the work prove joyous, and a

rich harvest of honest souls bring peace to the workers' hearts which surpasseth all understanding (Neilson 2009, 91).

As a missionary in Hong Kong, I was confronted by a culture that contained some obvious difficulties when it came to Mormon doctrine with the most apparent being the Word of Wisdom. China is, and has been for centuries, a tea culture. Tea is served at every meal and can be ritualized to serve a multitude of important social functions. How did the strict interpretation of the Word of Wisdom—which expressly forbids drinking tea—work with a cultural practice that is firmly entrenched in the Chinese psyche and culture? The missionaries were instructed by the general Church leadership that all flower-based teas were approved to drink. I grew especially fond of chrysanthemum tea and became quite adept at serving flower teas; the Chinese I ate with were often delighted by my enthusiasm for properly pouring tea. However, the colored teas—green, black, and red tea—were still a direct violation of the Word of Wisdom. When the missionaries in Hong Kong would teach the principle of the Word of Wisdom, and specifically about tea, we would add those caveats into the lesson. It was an interesting discovery that what I had been taught was previously unorthodox inside my own religious culture back in the United States—the consumption of any type of tea—was allowable for believers inside this complex Chinese circumstance.

As the Church continues to expand its international missionary force, difficult questions about globalization—and possibly the homogenization of culture—arise.

Richard O. Cowan (2003) explains the religious perspective that Mormons have on globalization:

For the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, globalization is more than just an interesting topic; it is an urgent priority. The mission of the Church is to bring all people everywhere to Jesus Christ so that they might enjoy the eternal fruits of his gospel. A worldwide Church is certainly in a better position to accomplish this mission than one that is only local or even regional [...] Church members view the process of globalization as the fulfillment of prophecy, both ancient and modern [...] and the spread of the Church] is something the Lord has commanded of his followers. Globalization therefore takes on a truly miraculous character. It is the fulfillment of the will of God [...] Thus] globalization concerns both the internationalization of the Church and its ability to adjust to different cultural conditions (x-xi).

While I believe that Cowan correctly identifies globalization inside a Mormon context, I was interested in deconstructing this idea to see if Mormon missionaries adapted to different cultural conditions through using folk culture to better spread their message.

In terms of general missiological literature on globalization, there are three voices about the interaction of religion and culture especially among missionizing sects. The oldest paradigm, inculturation, has been employed for centuries among those seeking to spread the faith. Inculturation “is a dialectical interaction between Christian

faith and cultures in which these cultures are challenged, affirmed, and transformed toward the reign of God, and in which Christian faith is likewise challenged, affirmed, and enhanced by this experience” (Arbuckle 2010, 152). Put simply, this position advocates for a discussion of opposing ideas in cultural contacts and an incorporation of those outcomes into the indigenous practice of the faith. However, as Arbuckle (2010) points out:

[Historically], [t]here [has been an] official unwillingness at the international and local levels of church[es] to “permit legitimate experiments in inculturation and to sanction successful experiments for ongoing use.” There is a general reluctance, especially among Western ecclesiastics, to accept the fact that their interpretation of their faith is significantly molded by their own cultures. Their culturally conditioned understandings of the Gospel are then assumed to be synonymous with the Kingdom of God itself (166).

This cultural conditioning can lead to problems with a globalizing church as foreign social structures can butt against Western religious notions of proper behavior. The process of re-evaluating the doctrinal and structural aspects of an internationally established religion can be culturally painful to new believers and to the clergy who serve them.

In 1972, inculturation gave way to a new position in missiological literature: contextualization (Moreau 2012). Contextualization meant that evangelical churches

were no longer focusing on indigenization of Christian beliefs. Rather, these churches were wrestling with the issue of how to “[take] biblical revelation that is universally true and applicable [... to] a world of societies that are widely diverse in their religious identities” (Ibid., 35). The goal of advocates of contextualization was to demonstrate how the Christian message could fit any person but also that the Christian lifestyle, in whatever form, could work in local settings. Coupled with this process, missionaries were expected to be more culturally sensitive and creatively examine their proselyting techniques understanding that, “since the Gospel message is inspired, but the mode of its expression is not, contextualization of the modes of expression is not only right but necessary” (Ibid., 19). Missionaries were charged with new translations of scripture, the courteous dismantling of “old” customs, building a new sociocultural order that was not a mirror of the missionaries’ native culture, and learning how to apply doctrinal tenets to the practical day-to-day cultural issues to build the Kingdom of God (Hiebert 1994).

The final position, although already a part of the contextualization debate, is a relatively recent school of thought which has gained prominence in the last 20 years: intercultural theology (Brinkman 2010). Dialogue-driven, intercultural theology essentially casts the interactions between other faiths as a subject of internal importance to Christians. Because the majority of Christians live among adherents of another global faith (i.e. Islam, Judaism, Buddhism), intercultural theology requires that missionaries understand the theological positions of other faiths and attempt to refine their ecclesiastical interactions with these faiths accordingly. Additionally, intercultural theology places less emphasis on the process of the adaptation of the Christian message

and instead focuses on the interplay between the local and global levels of churches in establishing a unity of the Christian faith (Ibid.).

However, these three positions on missiological issues are silent on the Mormon missionary experience. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Mormon missiology does not generally fit well into the body of greater missiological literature. Since Mormon missionaries are not professional clergy and nearly all of the decisions about Church policies or procedures in regards to proselyting are made by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, I think the most viable paradigm for exploring the adaptation of the message is to examine the use of folklore, and folk culture, among the teaching techniques of Mormon missionaries.

What is Folklore?

If I was to ask someone I just met to define “folklore” they would probably answer with any number of different images or examples. They might think of ghost stories told around a fire at summer camp. Or, talk about tall tales, legends, or fairy tales that they heard as a child and have possibly passed on to their own children. Folklore, though, is much broader in scope than the oral traditions we share as a culture. Like the concept of culture itself, folklore permeates everything around us; in fact, to reflect folklore’s ubiquitous nature, as Don Yoder suggested, the term “folklife” is probably a more correct characterization (Yoder 1976). Folklore, then, can be a fuzzy topic to address depending on the definition of “folklore”; in regards to this problem, I include three definitions I think will both help clarify, and muddy, our operational definition of folklore for this chapter.

The first definition comes from Jan Brunvand. Brunvand (1986), the originator of the term “urban legend” and specialist in the collection of urban legends, says the following about folklore:

Folklore comprises the unrecorded traditions of a people; it includes both the form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person. [...] Folklore is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples (1-4).

Brunvand emphasizes folklore as having a sense of the street. And, I mean that in the most literal way possible. Folklore is the unnoticed, unplanned ways we conduct life which makes sense because we are in thick of it; in other words, it is an invisible structure that adds meaning to the mundane. It is the street-level, grassroots, down-home paradigm for the social fabric of our lives.

The second definition comes from a scholar who spurred my interest in what I term “occupational anthropology” or the cultural study of groups of people by their choices of employment. Barre Toelken, in one of his chapters from *The Dynamics of Folklore*, discusses how lumberjacks preserve occupational culture and initiate new workers into the fold (Toelken 1979). Concerned heavily with the idea that folklore

does not exist inside a vacuum, but is a dynamic and alive art form, Toelken (1979) has this to say:

Tradition[s are not limited to the static past] but [are] those pre-existing culture-specific materials, assumptions, and options that bear upon the performer more heavily than do his or her own personal tastes and talents. We recognize in the use of *tradition* that such matters as content and style have been for the most part passed on but not invented by the performer. [...] Dynamic recognizes [...] that in the processing of these contents and styles in performance, the artist's own unique talents of inventiveness *within* the tradition are highly valued and are expected to operate strongly. Time and space dimensions remind us that the resulting variations may spread geographically with great rapidity (as jokes do) as well as down through time (good luck beliefs). Folklore is made up of informal expressions passed around long enough to have become recurrent in form and context, but changeable in performance (37).

Aside from the concept of folklore being dynamic, the concepts of time and space as dimensional operators in the preservation, selection, and presentation of folklore are the most useful pieces of Toelken's definition. Folk practices in 18th century Finland make little, or no, sense in 21st century Texas. That traditions connect cultures with the past is true; but, that past is contained within a specific context that defines its folklore while present-day cultures constantly redefine/reevaluate/re-create that folklore in new contexts adding additional layers of meaning.

The final definition comes from Martha Sims and Martine Stephens (2005), who provide a fresh look at examples of folklore which are extremely useful:

Yes, folklore is folk songs and legends. It's also quilts, Boy Scout badges, high school marching band initiations, jokes, chain letters, nicknames, holiday food [...] and many other things you might or might not expect. Folklore exists in cities, suburbs and rural villages, in families, work groups and dormitories. [...] It involves values, traditions, ways of thinking and behaving. It's about art. It's about people and the way people learn. It helps us learn who we are and how to make meaning in the world around us (1-2).

Folklore is the minutiae of life; and, because it is mixed into our everyday lives, we—as practitioners of folklife and folk culture—often fail to conceptualize it as a practical way of building meaning into our world. Especially in that light, the phrase about the way people learn is especially pertinent. Folklore is a process that interacts with various other processes simultaneously with human actors piecing together patchworks to build a lexicon for proper cultural behavior. Moving beyond Toelken, the folklore itself is not just dynamic; people are dynamic and inject that dynamism into creating this shared space of understanding. All of these definitions might seem like academic hair-splitting; but, they provide a framework for creating the definition of folklore I will use to measure the incorporation of folk culture into Mormon missionary teaching.

The “Definition” of Folklore

Folklore, at its heart, is about the simplest methods of creativity; it is the ordinary, daily ways groups play with, and within, culture (Bluestein 1994). And, as I began to formulate my own definition of that term for this project, I reexamined my understanding of folklore in connection with my experience as a missionary. I discovered that my mission had been permeated with attempts to use the culture of Hong Kong to teach people about Jesus Christ. For my purposes, I will define folklore as a unique understanding of the expressive culture (e.g. idioms, symbols, gestures, habits) of a group of people with at least a superficial working use of their cultural lexicon. Because Mormon missionaries have distinct mission parameters attached to their service, this cultural lexicon will be geographically specific, locally specialized, and chronologically distinct.

Because Mormon missionaries need to be culturally literate to engage individuals outside of their religious group, they have to become conversant with the culture they are assigned to serve in; therefore, the development of a folk lexicon is vital to missionary success. However, because folklore and folk culture are deep processes that can take years to understand while still remaining hidden to natives, the cultural lexicon of Mormon missionaries will be superficial. Additionally, this cultural fluency will be a reflection of their religious beliefs. Missionaries will know little the folklore/folk culture of drinking culture (because it is against the Word of Wisdom); alternatively, they will know much of the folklore/folk culture regarding family traditions and celebrations (because the Mormon-message is family-centric). This cultural lexicon will form the

backbone of techniques that the missionaries use to make a Gospel message culturally-relatable to the groups of people they encounter during their service.

Missions are geographically restricted areas. Leaving the assigned mission boundaries, without express permission from the mission president, are grounds for being dismissed early from missionary service. Since 1974, all missions have been named in the standard country/city format except in the United States where mission calls follow the format of state/city. When my mission president served his mission in Hong Kong in 1963, the mission was called the “Far East” Mission; my mission call, on the other hand, was to the “China Hong Kong” Mission. Missions are geographically specific in the minds to returned missionaries. A good illustration of this point is to ask a returned missionary about some location close to, but outside of, the mission boundaries. They probably will not be able to answer questions about folk practices outside of their assigned mission area; instead, they will probably steer back to a geographically specific context by saying something like, “I don’t know about the rest of (insert country name here) but in my mission the people did (insert cultural practice here).” Thus Mormon missionaries become uniquely attuned to their individual area because of the nature of their service, a probable divine mandate to understand that area specifically because it is “your” proselyting area, and because they do not disconnect their service as a missionary from geography—in fact, it is inherently restricted to geography which makes the mission experience extremely parochial.

Connected with geography, the physical boundaries of a mission can be extremely large or incredibly tiny. One of the individuals I interviewed served in Russia

where, he said, it would take eighteen hours to travel from one end of the mission to the other. A close family friend served in Los Angeles had a mission that was less than ten square miles in area. My mission could be traversed in about an hour and I could be to any set of missionaries in roughly 30 minutes. However, as missionaries, we were responsible for preaching in a section of the mission—called an “area”—that we had the sole proselyting responsibility for. For instance, I can speak about the folk culture of Tai Po and Tai Wo because I was in charge of that area for four months. But, I know little to nothing about Central—an area/district on Hong Kong Island—that I never really saw or served in. My knowledge of folk culture is limited to four areas of Tai Po/Tai Wo, Kwai Fong/Kwai Hing, Mong Kok/Tsim Sha Tsui and Tsuen Wan. While I understand general Chinese folk culture, I am (or at least was at the time) very familiar with the local cultures involved in each of those areas because I walked streets in those districts every day. And, my experience is not singular. Most missionaries I spoke with, included those missionaries I served with in Hong Kong, measured time by how many months, or missionary transfers, they spent in a certain city/area. This missionary conception of time further reinforces ideas about the geographic localization of missionary service. Therefore, even though missionaries might have a working folk knowledge of their mission in general, they will develop localized special knowledge of the individual cities/areas they served in.

Missions are also limited by chronological factors, the most important factor being the timeframe in which you served. I interviewed four individuals who served in South Korea from the span of 1975 to 2008. They had similar experiences but also

vastly different ones at the same time. My mission president served in 1963 and I served in 2000; he often remarked on how much he loved Hong Kong but that it had also changed markedly since he was there as a young man. Mission knowledge of folk culture is not immune to the effects of time just as folk culture in general is not. This time element means that returned missionaries have a static understanding of the folk culture of their mission inside a greater folklore process that is dynamic.

Two-Dollar Teaching

Getting back to the my love of coins, one of the principles in the first discussion of *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* dealt with the concepts of prophets and how the Holy Ghost helps humanity to know if a prophet's teachings come from God. To illustrate that point on my mission, we used the two-dollar Hong Kong coin I talked about in the beginning of this chapter. Imagine that we are sitting in a small room in a church in a fairly close triangular configuration. My companion, Elder Lowry, is to my right; our investigator, A-Giht, is to my left. After teaching about the purpose of prophets, I carefully reach into my pocket and make a fist around the two-dollar coin. Quickly pulling my fist out, our exchange would go something like this:

Elder Pepper: [holds closed fist out in front of him] In my hand, I have a two dollar coin.

A-Giht, do you believe me?

A-Giht: No, I don't.

Elder Pepper: Why not? I'm a pretty trustworthy guy. [said with a smile]

A-Giht: You could be lying; you could have anything in your hand. Besides, I can't see it.

Elder Pepper: Ok, fair enough. This coin represents God. We can't see God; but, He exists. However, He wants us to know about Him, and His Plan, for our lives. That's why He calls prophets to testify of Him and to write down scripture about Him for us to read and study. Let's pretend Elder Lowry here is a prophet. [holds hand out to Elder Lowry and opens it so that he can see what's inside but A-Giht can't] Elder Lowry, what's in my hand?

Elder Lowry: A two-dollar coin from Hong Kong.

Elder Pepper: [turning to A-Giht with fist out] Elder Lowry just saw the coin and told you the same thing I did earlier. He is usually honest. [again said with a smile] Do you believe that there is a two dollar coin in my hand now?

A-Giht: Yes, I guess so. He did see it and said it was a two dollar coin. But, I'm still not sure; you two could be playing a trick on me.

Elder Pepper: That's a good point. We want you to listen to our message not because we're funny, or we're handsome, or because we come from America. We know this message is true and we want you to know that same thing for yourself. Would you like to know how you can know what we are saying is true?

A-Giht: Sure.

Elder Pepper: Hold out your hand, close your eyes, and don't open them until I say to.

[Elder Pepper puts the two dollar coin in A-Giht's hand; he makes sure to let A-Giht feel

the ridges on the coin. A-Giht smiles widely and Elder Pepper removes the coin from his palm] A-Giht, what's in my fist?

A-Giht: [grinning] A two-dollar coin.

Elder Pepper: How did you know?

A-Giht: Because I could feel it; and, nothing else feels like a two-dollar coin.

Elder Pepper: That is same way you will come to know that what we teach is true. The Holy Ghost will help you feel it is right just like you could feel that coin was exactly what I said it was. And, that feeling will be like nothing else you've ever felt before. I've felt it and Elder Lowry has felt it too; and that's why we are here as missionaries. We want to share that with you.

We would then finish out the rest of the lesson and end with a challenge to pray to God and ask Him, for yourself, if what we had taught that day as missionaries was true.

This example demonstrates the definition of folklore I provided above. First, this shows a working knowledge of part of the Hong Kong cultural lexicon; from my experience, Hong Kong is an extremely money-driven society. The use of a coin, and all the connotations that creates in the Hong Kong psyche of success, fortune, and prosperity, makes it the perfect object lesson to capture attention. Second, it is geographically specific; an American penny or Japanese one yen would not elicit the same response. Third, it is locally specialized. The coin was actually a holdover from the British monetary system and is identifiable because of Hong Kong's former status as a British colony; the coin carries no contextual weight outside of that special socio-

historic framework. Finally, it is chronologically distinct. When I arrived in Hong Kong, the government was not minting any more of these two-dollar coins and, in fact, was in the process of attempting to remove them from circulation. While this technique worked 12 years ago, I doubt that it would be as successful now especially in the light of repeated attempts to completely eliminate the use of paper money and coins by the Hong Kong government.

The Hypothesis

My experience with tea in Hong Kong, and my use of the two-dollar coin teaching trick, led me to think about how, or if, other missionaries across the world would adapt their message/teaching techniques to local cultures. To that end, with the 82 individuals that I interviewed face-to-face, I asked them how they adapted a uniform Gospel message to a unique cultural context with the aim of testing this hypothesis:

Null 3: Missionaries will not alter any aspect of the message to fit within different cultural contexts.

Alternate 3: Missionaries will not alter the content of the message but will alter teaching methods drawing on folk culture to make the message culturally acceptable.

I wanted to know if these former missionaries adapted their teaching by using local folk culture to help the Gospel message become more understandable inside vastly different cultural groups. I was interested in discovering how much adaptation, if any,

was occurring with missionaries in cultures where Mormon doctrine might be at odds with social, cultural, historical, or political circumstances. As stated before, Mormon missionaries are not free to alter policies, programs, or doctrines to conform to the local standards of their assigned missions. My hypothesis was that, since Mormon missionaries are not given inculturative freedom regarding doctrinal applications to new cultural contexts, they will instead use folk culture to make the message more meaningful, and therefore more acceptable, inside varied cultural contexts.

The Results

When designing this project, I decided to leave the question about adaptation of the Gospel message and folk culture off of the survey. There were three practical reasons for that decision. First, because I needed the survey to snowball, I designed it to require roughly ten minutes to fully complete. I tried to make the questions short and simple so that the respondents would have a more positive experience, and hopefully, be more likely to pass it on to others. Second, I expected a fairly high response rate and I wanted to complete the project in a timely manner. So, rather than sift through hundreds of typed responses, I decided to ask this question personally. Third, the complexity of the question demanded a more hands-on approach. Interpretations of the question, the subtle nuances of answers, and the give-and-take of the interview process allow for a deeper exchange of information in this particular regard than a survey would have offered. I could ask probing questions. I could listen to, and respond, to pieces of the answer I thought were interesting. I could clarify points of confusion and focus thought patterns in a specific direction. To be short, I could control the process better. Was that

the best way? Maybe. Would I have gotten the same response from the online survey if I had included the question? I do not know. But, like in all research, you make your methodological decisions and you live with your results.

The 82 face-to-face interviews yielded some interesting findings. Out of my 82 informants, only four individuals described using any form of folk culture in adapting their message to the local cultures they interacted with as missionaries. The majority, 79 people, suggested that they changed the order of the lessons or personalized the message to individual families. That means that only 3.6% of individuals tried to use folk culture to share their message; the overwhelming 96.4% of former missionaries did not. One informant even went so far as to tell me that they did not adapt the message at all; in his opinion, the message was true, people needed to learn to accept that, and if they did not it was their fault (suffice it to say, he was—thankfully—in the extreme minority).

In the 79-person majority, 35 individuals served after the introduction of the new missionary manual, *Preach My Gospel*, in October of 2004. As described in Chapter III, *Preach My Gospel* essentially combined two of the former missionary tools, *The Missionary Guide* and *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel*, into one program. Previously, *The Missionary Guide* provided training for the missionaries on how to teach and skills to understand in helping missionaries share the Gospel. *The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel* was a set of six discussions that detailed basic Mormon beliefs and contained the material the missionaries were supposed to cover in their lessons. They were not supposed to be memorized (although many missionaries from my time, including myself, had to memorize them) and they provided small outlines of how to

teach certain sections with understandable examples. They were also numbered and were intended to be taught in sequential order; and, they built—for the most part—on the previous lesson's material. *Preach My Gospel*, by comparison, became more principle based. Missionaries were given the freedom to alter the order of principles taught and the focus became less on a standard way of sharing the Gospel and more geared toward the individual being taught.

When talking to those informants who served after *Preach My Gospel* came out, nearly all these former missionaries talked with me about focusing on, and teaching to, individuals. Either they focused heavily on planning each lesson for the individual or they simply thought that adapting the message meant putting the individual being taught at the center of the learning experience. This focus on the individual could have left room for more adaptation; but, no one indicated anything further in that area.

Eventually, I wondered if I had written the question clearly enough to get the information I was looking for. I started to prompt my informants to think deeper usually by saying something like, “So, how did you adapt the message to Venezuelans; because, Venezuelans aren't Americans and they certainly aren't like the Chinese I served in Hong Kong?” Still, I got no real change in responses. The returned missionaries I interviewed could not recall any use of folklore among their teaching techniques. Most individuals, after we finished the interview, even asked what information I was looking for from that specific question. After explaining to them that I was looking at the use of folklore/folk culture in Mormon missionaries' teaching, they would think for a second, shrug, and basically repeat their original answer with very slight deviations.

Looking at the four informants who said something about adapting the message to local contexts yields some interesting findings. The first returned missionary served from 2005 to 2007 in the state of Montana. During that time, he was assigned to serve on the local Crow reservation for five months. He said it was easy to teach people up in Montana because the missionaries could relate any of the principles of the Gospel to hunting, fishing, and being outdoors. He said that everything they taught would use examples from one of those facets of life to make the message more relatable to the people they were teaching as a companionship. He described the people in Montana as being very attached to nature and that they would often ask the missionaries why they needed to go to a physical building to attend church; they preferred to worship in the serene stillness of nature. That connection to the land, and to the lifestyle associated with it, provided the missionaries with a wealth of material to supplement their discussions.

The second informant, who served in Idaho, talked about going on cattle drives (certainly not an activity that falls within generally approved proselyting techniques) and teaching principles to the cowboys while the cattle were being fed and watered. He indicated that, since the land was sacred to them because it provided their livelihood, the missionaries related as many principles of the discussions as possible to farming, ranching, and working with cattle.

The third returned missionary, also from a mission in the United States, served along the Mexican border in Arizona. He described the area very similarly to Montana: lots of flat spaces, sparsely populated, extreme temperatures, and lots of walking. His

companionship related most of what they were teaching to farming because many people were farmers by trade. He talked about riding in tractors with people, him in one tractor and his companion in another, as they would teach farmers principles from the discussions. He also talked about helping around the farm with chores while discreetly sharing part of their Gospel message. Like the people of Montana, these people had a deep connection to the land and often felt their most spiritual while out working on it.

The fourth informant from this small group, again in the United States, served his mission in New York City. Assigned to be a Portuguese-speaking missionary in an English-speaking country, he had only four companions his entire mission because of the nature of his missionary assignment. When I asked if there were a lot of Portuguese-speaking individuals in New York City, he told me that there were not very many and that he basically became responsible for teaching anyone from South to Central America. Interestingly, he told me that they used food to teach the Gospel. His companionships would learn the regional dishes and culinary specialties of any country south of the US border. When they encountered someone on the street from one of those countries, they would start their missionary approach by asking if that individual had ever eaten their country's specific regional dish. Of course, many people had; and, he said they were startled to see that white, American missionaries would know anything about their country's important cultural dishes. These conversations usually ended with a dinner invitation to try said dish, full missionary stomachs, and a spiritual lesson from the missionaries. He said watching the smiles on people's faces when they would

mention the Chilean Flag (a type of rice dish that was colored to resemble their national flag) would be worth every rejection they got that day on the street.

I decided to include my own experience with employing a different folklore practice because it will illustrate an important finding later. My other personal favorite things to use, while contacting on the streets of Hong Kong, were *syut wahs*. The Chinese have four-character sayings—especially popular around Chinese New Year—that are extremely fun to learn. I made a habit of memorizing as many of these idioms as I could. I would often start a street contact with an idiom and play around with/pun Cantonese to get a smile from the Chinese. I will never forget the time during Chinese New Year when I said “Happy New Year” to an older gentleman on the street. He replied with a classic idiom, “Dragon Horse Energy.” Sensing that a battle was about to begin, I fired back another idiom, “Step by step until perfection.” He smiled. We went back and forth for about five minutes exchanging idioms; finally, I was victorious when he repeated an earlier idiom. He laughed, admitted defeat, and asked what I was doing in Hong Kong and where I had learned so much about Chinese idiomatic language. I told him I was a missionary and I had learned it all here in Hong Kong. He assumed I had been there at least ten years and was very surprised when I informed him I had been there about a year. We then sat down and talked about missionary work. He did not get baptized; but, he learned that there were more to these foreign missionaries than met the eye.

The remarkable thing to come out of these examples is that it does not appear that missionaries adapt their messages/approaches to folk culture. But, instead, they

appear to adapt their message based on rural/urban areas which was an unexpected result and appears to be significant. In the first three examples, the missionaries adapted their teaching techniques and finding to things that a rural population would understand. In the second two examples, the missionaries used food and holiday celebrations to make positive contacts. I will attempt to tease out why this rural/urban use of folklore appears to be the only type of adaptation that missionaries use that borders on being culturally specific.

Missionaries in extremely rural or extremely urban areas deal with separate challenges in working with people. In rural areas, individuals might not welcome visitors. Missionaries that I talked to who served in backwoods areas or in farming communities said that they were often distrusted and accused of working for some branch of law enforcement. One informant told me a story about how his companionship got a surprised “how did you find me?!” and a loaded sawed-off shotgun pointed at their faces at one door they knocked on in rural Idaho. After they explained they were missionaries, they promptly left. Missionaries who work in these rural areas could be seen as outsiders encroaching on the private lives of people who want to be left alone or who do not take kindly to strangers. A general rule of life is that people like to talk; and, people especially like to talk about themselves and things they enjoy. Missionaries in rural areas would need to have a sense of the local culture so that they could make small talk before introducing their message. Having a command of the folk culture of the area is pivotal in establishing enough trust to effectively carry out missionary work.

Missionaries in dense urban areas, like New York or Hong Kong, run into a different problem. In this case, people tend to avoid talking to strangers because of the pace of city life as well as the unspoken rules about casual social interactions in a densely packed urban area. With the constant flow of people, city dwellers can become cut off from others around them; this could be especially frustrating to missionaries because their primary contacting techniques in cities involve approaching people on the street. It was incredibly difficult to talk to people on any public transportation (bus, taxi, or subway) on my mission. People would ignore missionaries; or, if they were in a bad mood, they would begin to openly mock the missionaries in public. Moreover, people choose to cut themselves off from other people; to some extent, city life can be lonely or even heartless. Learning the local folk culture is necessary to eliminating the aura of being a tourist and moving a missionary from just another person to a fellow New Yorker or a “Hong Kong Person.” The creation of this community feeling is vital to reaching people in urban areas as missionaries.

Future Research

When thinking about the use of folk culture among missionaries, it would be interesting to see if the changes in missionary teaching programs over the years have changed how missionaries adapted their message.

Another line of research that would be fascinating would be to examine why, if using folk culture is such an effective teaching technique, missionaries generally appear to avoid it. Does the way a missionary is trained matter in cultural adaptation of the Gospel message? My trainer/first companion certainly loved to employ folk culture

whenever he could when sharing the Word on the street. Are there structural reasons for the avoidance of folk culture? Does the climate of Mormon missionary work dissuade experimentation with teaching techniques? These questions would help flesh out the ethnographic picture of the Mormon missionary experience in greater detail.

Teasing apart the different aspects of folk culture (like the use of idioms) and interviewing returned missionaries specifically along those dimensions to see if the results would differ would be an extremely worthwhile project to undertake. Based on what I have encountered already, I am doubtful there would be a significant change in former missionaries' reports of the use of folk culture in teaching. However, I could be quite wrong in that assumption.

It would also be interesting to examine why all examples of the use of folklore/folk culture among Mormon missionaries were basically located in the United States. Is the market for religion saturated in America causing missionaries resort to more novel tactics involving the use of folk culture to gain converts? Branching out from that question, other pertinent lines of research would include investigating if the use of folklore actually leads to increases in numbers of converts and/or why missionaries do not employ folklore as a teaching technique (e.g. not trained to, other missionary tactics are more effective, missionary perceptions about the use of folklore being unorthodox).

Finally, I would like to talk to returned missionaries more in depth about folk culture. A particularly useful study would be to measure the use of folklore in intensely rural and urban areas to see if any of these early predictions on the use of folk culture to

adapt the Gospel message can be further verified. Also, I think a study of how missions keep folklore alive and transmit that folklore to the next generation of missionaries could also yield some fascinating conclusions about the folkloristic processes of Mormon missionaries.

Conclusion

Through the information provided by my informants about the use of folklore/folk culture among Mormon missionaries to make their religious message more palatable in different cultural contexts, my third null hypothesis was supported. Mormon missionaries do not appear to employ folklore to adapt the message; rather, the focus of adaptation seems to be on the individual investigator that the missionaries are teaching. Nearly all of the returned missionaries I spoke with indicated that adapting the message to the needs of a specific person was the most effective, and widely used, missionary approach regardless of culture differences.

However, instead, I also discovered that missionaries in extremely rural or urban areas tend to use folk culture as a way to get to know people better and that they adapt their techniques to the local community flavor. These techniques seemed to be based on hobbies, occupations, jokes, food, or specific objects (like coins). Further study of these attempts at cultural adaptation of the Mormon message could, in time, yield some new insights into the dynamics of folklore that can exist inside formal teaching structures of Mormon missionaries.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Final Notes

And so, I have reached the end. Throughout this dissertation, we have scratched the surface of the secret life of Mormon missionaries. However, at this point, a recap of the major questions and answers might be prudent.

First, I discovered that none of the usual demographic indicators—age, sex, ethnicity, or occupation—had any correlation to the hypotheses 1A, 1B, 2 or 3. Because of the young age at which Mormons serve as missionaries, occupational choices for Mormon missionaries are not solidified until after the completion of missionary service. Since missionary service is nearly always completed before formal occupational training occurs, future occupation had no predictive power on any of the questions I was asking. Unfortunately, the ethnic variety of my sample was too low to draw any useful conclusions; out of 875 surveys and 82 interviews, only 57 individuals listed their ethnicity as any other ethnic group aside from White. This lack of diversity did not allow me to confidently examine ethnicity as an influential factor on Mormon missionary work. And, despite my attempts to demonstrate disparities in mission experiences between Sister missionaries and their male counterparts, there was no indication of gender having substantial impacts on life inside the mission. It is possible, though, that my own gender indirectly influenced these results. On the subject of Sister missionaries, a female researcher might have obtained a more honest evaluation of gender relations among Mormon missionaries. However, age was a correlative factor in

what type of challenge—cultural or mission—was the most difficult for Mormon missionaries to overcome during their service. Older missionaries more often chose cultural challenges (food, language, people, or culture) as a significant problem; younger missionaries, on the other hand, chose structures inside the Mormon mission (the mission president, companions, other mission leaders, or themselves) as the more difficult challenges. Additionally, 78% of respondents indicated that the adjustment to Mormon missionary life was more difficult to adapt to than life among a non-native culture. This finding seems to suggest that the culturally familiar structures of Mormonism might be the hardest adjustment to make inside this new missionary life.

Second, I learned that the missionary trainer/first companion is the most influential person in establishing a missionaries' identity and contributing to their cultural understanding. Contrary to my hypothesis 1A, the mission president is not the most influential person in forming Mormon missionary identity if a missionary serves a mission inside their own native culture. Surprisingly though, the mission president or a native companion are equally influential on the formation of missionary identity in a non-native culture. In regards to hypotheses 1B, I found that the trainer/first companion's proximity, example (good or bad), and their veteran knowledge pushed them to the forefront of influence on Mormon missionary identity; mission presidents, on the other hand, had geographic distance, access, and personality conflicts which caused missionaries to rank them lower. MTC teachers were usually with missionaries only a short time which caused their impact to be substantial early but inconsequential after the missionary arrived in their assigned mission. In the case of native missionaries,

there were simply few opportunities for most missionaries to serve with these individuals thus curtailing their overall influence. The least influential power position was the district/zone leader; missionaries simply could not remember them or felt that their influence was minor due to little interaction with them. Overall, these results indicate that formal authority positions, despite serving in a native or non-native culture, are the most crucial in helping to form Mormon missionary identity.

Third, I found that hypothesis two was initially supported; missionaries did conceptualize their missionary experiences as a unique time akin to the concept of a self-contained life. While aspects of a rite of passage, liminal phase, or initiation were present in the answers missionaries gave, 33% of individuals spoke about the mission in terms denoting it as being a completely separate/self-contained place (bubble, missionary world, dream, different life, etc.). Additionally, I did discover that the missionary experience filled vastly different roles, as a life event, for different people due to its incredibly personalized, and intensely spiritual, nature. Although this finding is somewhat specious, I am confident that further research along these lines could yield more definitive answers about the place a Mormon mission occupies as a life event among returned Mormon missionaries.

Fourth, my final alternate hypothesis was not supported by the information provided by my face-to-face interviews. Mormon missionaries do not, generally speaking, use knowledge of folklore/folk culture to tailor their teachings to the cultures they serve in. I did, however, discover that missions that contain areas which are extremely rural or densely urban tend to find missionaries trying new approaches using

folklore and adapting the message to the people around them. I decided that this urban/rural discovery could be because these are two areas where people have extreme living conditions—they are isolated either by space/occupation in the rural case or by the anonymity/enormity of the city—and traditional missionary proselyting techniques might be ineffective. This seems to suggest that different cultural contexts have little impact on the use of folklore to adapt the Gospel message; rather, the missionaries' use of folk knowledge seems to be tied to the level of population density in the areas they are assigned to work in.

This dissertation stands as a substantial addition to the anthropology of Mormonism due to its autoethnographic access and its examination of an important co-culture inside a mainstream global religion. Additionally, this work partially bridges the gap discussed in Chapter I about the application of traditional concepts of missiology to Mormonism. It also begins to address basic anthropological questions about identity, rites of passage, and folklore among Mormon missionaries with potential research applications to greater Latter-day Saint culture. This dissertation also collects a substantial amount of history of the missionary program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints into one work allowing for a more contextually comprehensive look at Mormon missionaries. And finally, on a more practical note, this dissertation could be of use to any missionizing sect to train more anthropologically-informed missionaries or in the creation of less ethnocentric proselyting policies.

The field for continued anthropological research concerning Mormon missionaries is, to employ Mormon terminology, “white and already to harvest.” While

I am certain any research into Mormon missionaries would create welcome scholarship, two projects spring to mind. First, it would be fascinating to examine a Mormon mission as a culture and track its metamorphosis over time. Of special interest inside this project would be to see how much cultural variation a mission experienced, which aspects remained the same (e.g. proselyting techniques, folk stories, missionary narratives) and which changed (e.g. concepts of an “effective” missionary, teaching techniques, member/missionary relations). Although the Church does keep records on which members served missions and where they served, I do not know how any researcher would obtain that information. Aside from that, the cost to conduct a project of that scale would be beyond what is feasible for most research grants. Second, I think an attempt to conduct an ethnologic evaluation of missionary work would yield important findings. A comparison of Mormon missionaries from different missions around the globe, but who were serving at the same chronological period, could illuminate better the actual culture of Mormon missionaries. Connected to that project, an interesting approach would be to interview, and follow, specific missionaries through the entirety of their missionary service and interview those individuals at specific intervals (5 years, 10 years, etc.) to see how the cultural experience of being a Mormon missionary has impacted their lives. Again, as before, this project would require a meticulous researcher with a substantial amount of funding to successfully complete it. These two projects will hopefully begin to spur future anthropologists, and the reader, on to further explorations into the anthropology of Mormonism and into greater research examining Mormon missionaries as an important religious community.

The Fun of Fieldwork: Humor among Mormon Missionaries

Before concluding this dissertation, I wanted to include some of the humorous stories that former missionaries shared with me. Humor is an excellent way to see the underlying cultural values of a specific group (Raskin 2008); and, Mormon missionaries have a sense of humor all their own. Additionally, part of the fun of fieldwork is the stories the anthropologist takes home with them. These vignettes also help to flesh out the greater ethnographic experience of being a Mormon missionary in an amusing way. While the anthropology of humor might not be a prominent subfield, this quick anthropological look at missionary work demonstrates that the daily lives of Mormon missionaries are surprisingly entertaining.

On the way to their missionary apartment, and carrying his entire luggage, a new missionaries' trainer/first companion said that he would go get the elevator for them. Rushing ahead, the trainer entered the elevator and told the new missionary to hurry up because the Chinese people did not like to wait. When the overburdened missionary breached the entry, the trainer/first companion pressed the door close button, violently smashing the green missionary with the elevator doors. His trainer/first companion burst out laughing and said that pain was all part of the mission. His trainer/first companion had done the same thing to him as a new missionary and he had to carry on the tradition. After dropping the luggage off in the apartment, the trainer/first companion told the new missionary to go get the elevator while he locked the door. When the elevator arrived, it was empty. The new missionary got in and started yelling about an imaginary Chinese person in the elevator who angrily wants that the new missionary to do some he cannot

understand. The trainer/first companion tells him to use the stuff they taught him at the MTC and the new missionary responds, even more terrified, that he cannot remember it. The trainer/first companion tells him not to worry and that he is coming to help. Sprinting down the hallway, the trainer finally reaches the elevator. Just as he does, the new missionary presses the door close button. Smashed between the doors and knocked backwards out of the elevator, the trainer lands in the hallway with a stunned look. The new missionary simply leans back, folds his arms, and says, "I learn fast. Welcome to Hong Kong." The trainer/first companion sheepishly grinned and they both had a good laugh.

A missionary had just transferred to a new proselyting area. His companion informed him that, later on that night, they would be visiting the home of an inactive member of the Church. On the way there, his companion added that this particular member had been causing problems for the missionaries and that the mission president had asked them to visit and see if they could reach a solution. After getting to the house and knocking on the door, a man wearing camo answered. The veteran missionary begins to tell him that he needs to leave the missionaries alone. As the conversation continues, it grows more heated until the man says he has had enough and to get off his property. From behind the door, he pulls out a shotgun and aims it at the missionaries. They dart off the porch and separate to avoid getting shot. Frantically, the new missionary hides behind a car. Suddenly, two shots ring out. Terrified, he begins to cry, thinking that his companion had just been murdered. From the other side of the house, his companion yells "April Fools!" The gun-wielding member was actually a returned

missionary himself—home only four months from serving in College Station, Texas—and he wanted to have some fun with the newest addition to the missionary area.

When the new missionaries arrived at the LTM, they were lined up for a dress code check. Informed that they would be inspected, they were told to stand at attention while a three of the more senior missionaries made sure they looked like fit representatives of the Church. However, as the stunned missionaries assembled, the inspectors began to review their appearance in German. Halfway down the line, with clipboard in hand, one of the missionary drill sergeants stopped. One missionary, who was wearing an inappropriate neck tie, shifted his gaze downward. The inspector began screaming at him in German while feverishly writing notes on his clipboard. After barking an order at another missionary, a pair of scissors was produced. Grabbing the missionary by the knot in his tie, the inspector snipped his tie off and threw it back to him. Shocked, but still in formation, the other missionaries did not know what to do. After scowling at the tieless Elder, the senior missionaries all burst into laughter. The other missionaries already at the LTM did the same and the new missionaries were warmly welcomed with hugs, handshakes, and a hymn.

A pair of missionaries were riding their bikes to their next teaching appointment when they stopped at light. A car pulled up beside them and rolled down the window. Yelling “Hey, Mormons!” and producing a huge cup, the passenger threw beer all over one of the missionaries and then drove off. Soaked and smelling like alcohol, the two missionaries continued to a local gas station. When they arrived, they parked their bikes and the soiled missionary went inside to get the key to the bathroom. While he was

gone, the perpetrators pulled into the station to get some gas and probably more beer. Angry at the way that his companion had been treated and completely unnoticed by the two men, the missionary waited for them to go inside. It had been a particularly difficult transfer for this missionary and he was not in the mood to be delayed on their way to an appointment. He took out his pocket knife, walked over to the car as it was fueling, and cut the stems off all four tires. When his companion got out of the bathroom, he said they needed to hurry up so they would not be any later than they already were going to be. After they got to the appointment, he confessed to his companion what had happened and why they needed to make such a hasty exit from the gas station.

The missionaries had a certain street corner where they would have street meetings. Every time they would get set up to preach, a particularly antagonistic man would appear and start heckling them. Eventually, he began to drive off people who were sincerely interested in what the missionaries had to say. One of the missionaries in the area, who has very large with a short fuse for a temper, decided to he was going to do something about it. When the heckler arrived, this missionary grabbed him and shoved him into an alley. Easily picking him up by his coat lapels, the missionary told him that he never wanted to see him around that corner again. He warned him that if he did, in fact, ever see him again, the heckler would not be able to literally walk away. Terrified, the heckler bolted out of the alley and the missionaries continued to preach unmolested. Weeks passed and the heckler was up to his old tricks again. He approached the missionaries and began pestering them. As it happened, the muscular missionary happened to be in the area again. He silently came and stood behind the heckler who

turned around to leave and ran smack into the chest of the large missionary. The former missionary who told me this story said that he had never seen a man run so fast across four lanes of traffic.

Missionaries come out of their apartment one morning to find a black Escalade waiting at the park across the street. A little nervous but otherwise alright, the missionaries get in their car and begin driving to their appointment. The Escalade starts to follow them. When they arrive at the appointment, they park and get out. The Escalade parks behind them but no one gets out. After teaching their hour-long lesson, the missionaries exit the house to find the Escalade still there. Wondering what is going on, one of the missionaries decides to knock on the window. The window rolls down and the missionary asks if the occupants are lost or if there is anything they can do to help them. A large tattooed Hispanic man asks them what they are doing. They say they are missionaries sharing a message about God. Surprised, the man says that they had talked to his girlfriend on the street a couple of days earlier. He had followed them to make sure that they were actually missionaries. After apologizing, he tells the missionaries that if anyone causes them any trouble to let him know and he would “take care of it.” The missionaries assure him that they are ok and he repeats the instructions this time patting a large semi-automatic weapon he had under his coat. Signaling to his driver, they speed off. The missionaries later discovered he was the leader of an infamously violent gang with no qualms about making people “disappear.”

While tracting one night, the missionaries ran into a particularly rude couple. As they answered the door, the man said they were not interested in hearing any religious

message. His wife comes to the door and asks where the missionaries are from. Responding that they are both from America, she asks which part of America they are from. One of the Elders was from Colorado and, sensing an opportunity, told her he was from the fictitious town of Pork n' Beans. He asked if she had heard of it. Of course she had. She had even seen it on the TV and in photographs. He asked if she thought it was a pretty city. She said it was one of the most beautiful places she had ever seen. At this point, his companion begins to chuckle while attempting to stifle his laughter. The husband, who begins to suspect something, looks over to the wife and tells her the missionaries are playing tricks on her. The missionaries burst out laughing and she slams the door in their face.

Near their apartment, the missionaries were being heckled by some local kids. Every day, when the missionaries would leave, they would throw fireworks at them. Because they were both white, wore nice clothes, and were from America, the missionaries were often accused of being CIA agents sent to spy on the local town. Tired of having explosives hurled at them, the missionaries doctor up some fake CIA badges. The next morning, when the kids began throwing their fireworks, one of the missionaries calls their leader over to talk. Flashing the fake badges, the missionaries told him that they were really undercover CIA agents and that the loud noises drew unnecessary attention to their work. Additionally, they explained that they did not want to get injured while trying to do their job. The wide-eyed young man apologized and the missionary asked for his help in keeping their secret safe. The next morning, kids began to throw fireworks again. When the lead boy got wind of this, he called off the attack

and gave a knowing wink to the missionaries. For several transfers after that, the missionaries were not bothered by fireworks or groups of local youngsters. When the mission president found out what they had done, he lightly chastised them after having a good laugh.

In one area, the Church was having some problems with the female members of the congregation arriving for Sunday meetings topless. The missionaries did not know how quite to address the problem aside from telling the members that everyone needed to wear a shirt to the meetings. The area they were serving in was not rich and the missionaries could not afford to clothe everyone themselves. Thankfully, the Church had sent a large bundle of men's button-up dress shirts to help with the problem. After being distributed to members of the congregation, the missionaries hoped that the issues of exposed breasts in church meetings would disappear. At the next Sunday's meetings, the Elders eagerly awaited the female parishioners' arrival. The women were all wearing the white shirts that had been provided, with one slight alteration. They had cut holes in the shirt and pulled their breasts through. When the Elders asked what was going on, one of the sisters remarked that the shirts were nice but inconvenient for breastfeeding. In meetings that Sunday, the Elders specified that the sisters needed to wear an entire shirt the next week's Sunday services.

The Question of Why?

In closing, there are questions I have not discussed that are pertinent to the ethnographic challenge of making the life of a Mormon missionary truly experience-able: if a mission is so intense and difficult, what keeps missionaries going from day to

day? And, more importantly, why would any individual dedicate two years to the full-time service of God? The obvious answer would be their faith. But, the answer, I think, goes beyond belief. It goes to the heart of what the Gospel message is: hope that humanity can change, be something better today than yesterday, and that everyone, everywhere can have true happiness in their life. A former missionary companion of mine once said that a mission is 99% hard, depressing work and 1% inexpressible joy. I want to close the book with a vignette that one of my informants shared that I felt illustrated that point perfectly:

I think for me the biggest thing that changed, I think is my understanding of Jesus Christ and my relationship with him. I think before my mission I had a very, I had a testimony, and I knew the church was true. I read the *Book of Mormon*; I prayed about it, but, I think I kinda missed the core of the Gospel which is Christ. And, I think it was very important for me to go out and see people whose lives were kind of a mess and be able to see them change. And, I think I really gained a testimony. Like it wasn't, it wasn't just the church and its programs that changed them it was Christ's atonement that really changed their lives.

There's one couple right at the end of my mission who, um, they were...the scum of the earth when we met them. I mean they were living in the projects essentially. They were on welfare, who knows what they were doing because their apartment was always rank. They smoked; they would get the

really cheap tobacco like in the tub and rolled their own cigarettes. That stuff just stinks. They were just, I don't know. For a while like her daughter was living there; she was an unsavory individual doing who knows what. They didn't have jobs; I mean they were who knows what. They were just white-trash, welfare folks and we had little hope for them when we first meet them. But, he thought he was a member. I think his parents may have been members. But, no one was at all active and he wasn't actually a member we later found out. There was no record of him. So, he probably went to church a couple times with his grandparents when he was little. They were just kinda crazy. And we started meeting with them and they would never do any of the things we asked. We got them a ride to church one Sunday. They came to church and right after sacrament meeting they wanted to talk to the Bishop and they asked him for money and the bishop was just frustrated. He said, "So you know what? If they can afford their cigarettes they can afford a bus ticket to get to church. We're not going to provide them a ride." And so we said ok. And I think at the time I was a little like why not? Come on, Bishop. Now as an adult, I'm like good for the Bishop.

We didn't see them much anymore after that. I mean we stopped by occasionally. And then something happened, and I still don't know what happened. But we stopped by one day and they'd been reading in the *Book of Mormon*. And we're like great well come to church. Sorry, we can't get you a ride there but we'd love to see you there. It's the middle of the summer; I guess

it was early summer, in Tucson, Arizona. Hot. They walked something like five miles to church. They were there; they didn't ask for money, they were just there to go to church. And of course we got them a ride home and worked things out after that. But, something had changed inside of them. They got baptized. He got some security guard training; they both have decent jobs, I mean nothing fancy, but they moved out of the terrible place they lived in. They've essentially adopted these two kids who were growing up basically in the projects and they've been baptized. They're active members of the church. It took them about 4 or 5, I think it was about 4 years after they were baptized before they were sealed but they kept plugging along. I mean they had a lot of challenges. I think that was toward the end of my mission. A lot of me seeing them change happened after. I think that's just a good example of what I saw; I saw the Atonement just completely change someone's life and realizing it's not the Church. I mean the Church is a wonderful thing. But, the Church just points people to Christ and really understanding and getting to know Him and understanding better His role in everything.

Mormon missionary work is tough; it is an unforgiving work done by imperfect people in the name of a perfect God. It is laying everything on the altar day after day and coming up far short. But, as my informants told me, there is no experience like it. I hope that, through this dissertation, the reader has been able to catch a glimpse into the world of the Mormon mission, to experience the unexperienced life of a Mormon

missionary, and to develop an anthropological understanding of this distinct religious culture. I have barely scratched the surface of the wealth of questions that could be posed about such a pivotal, and powerful, time in the life of a Latter-day Saint. How this fundamental institution will continue to meet the needs of the membership, and the growing demands of globalization, is a question that continues to unfold. The Mormon missionary, as a symbol, as a cultural institution, as a subset of other Christian missionaries, and as a co-culture inside mainstream Mormonism, is not going away. It remains, then, to see how this unique aspect of Mormonism continues to thrive, and be ethnographically studied, in the future.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS FOR RESPONDENTS/INTERVIEWEES

1. Lots of individuals help us develop our understanding of the culture we serve in as missionaries. These cultural perceptions shape how we do missionary work and our identities as missionaries. Please rank the following individuals based on how important they were in helping you form your understanding of the culture you served in and in developing your identity, and style, as a Mormon missionary. (1 for most important to 6 for the least important).

My mission president
An MTC teacher

My trainer/first companion
District/zone leader

My second companion
My native companion

2. Missionary work can require a lot of adjustments. Personally, which adjustment was more difficult for you?

Learning how to live as a Mormon missionary
Learning how to live in the culture you served in

3. Missionary service is a unique time in our lives for many different reasons. Which of the following statements best describes how you would classify your service?

A time where you moved from one stage to another more important stage
A time that is self-contained with different ways of measuring progress, time and growth
A time of transition between other important life events
A time where you had greater respect, or responsibility, inside your religion
None of these describe how I felt about my missionary service

4. What would you consider was the greatest challenge on your mission? Please rank the following items based on how challenging they were. (1 for the most challenging to 8 for the least challenging)?

Your mission president
Other mission leaders
A companion
Yourself

The food
The culture
The people
The language

5. The Gospel message missionaries share is uniform across the world. However, the variation of cultures across the world can make sharing a single message difficult. How did you adapt a uniform message to a unique culture as a missionary? (Face-to-face interviews only)

APPENDIX B

TABLES

Table 1: Interviews Per Ward

Bryan 1st Ward	16
College Station 1st Ward	15
College Station 2nd Ward	20
College Station 3rd Ward	19
Traditions Ward	12

Table 2: Occupational Breakdown Survey Results

Occupational Type	Respondents	Percent
Architecture and Engineering	24	2.74%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	73	8.34%
Business and Finance	93	10.63%
Community and Social Services	15	1.71%
Computers and Mathematics	83	9.49%
Construction and Extraction	7	0.80%
Education, Training, and Library Science	137	15.66%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	5	0.57%
Fire and Police	3	0.34%
Healthcare and Medicine	59	6.74%
Healthcare Support	8	0.91%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	1	0.11%
Legal	50	5.71%
Life, Physical, and Social Sciences	25	2.86%
Management	42	4.80%
Military	11	1.26%
Office and Administrative Support	17	1.94%
Personal Care and Service	1	0.11%
Production	4	0.46%
Sales	40	4.57%
Stay-at-home parent	55	6.29%
Student	109	12.46%
Transportation and Materials Moving	6	0.69%
Blank	7	0.80%

Table 3: Occupational Breakdown Interview Results

Occupational Type	Respondents	Percent
Architecture and Engineering	2	2.44%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	0	0.00%
Business and Finance	7	8.54%
Community and Social Services	0	0.00%
Computers and Mathematics	3	3.66%
Construction and Extraction	0	0.00%
Education, Training, and Library Science	21	25.61%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	0	0.00%
Fire and Police	1	1.22%
Healthcare and Medicine	3	3.66%
Healthcare Support	0	0.00%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	0	0.00%
Legal	0	0.00%
Life, Physical, and Social Sciences	1	1.22%
Management	0	0.00%
Military	0	0.00%
Office and Administrative Support	3	3.66%
Personal Care and Service	4	4.88%
Production	0	0.00%
Sales	1	1.22%
Stay-at-home parent	6	7.32%
Student	30	36.59%
Transportation and Materials Moving	0	0.00%
Blank	0	0.00%

Table 4: Year Mission Started Survey Results

Mission Groups	Respondents	Percent
1960-1965	7	0.80%
1966-1970	8	0.91%
1971-1975	14	1.60%
1976-1980	32	3.66%
1981-1985	36	4.11%
1986-1990	66	7.54%
1991-1995	85	9.71%
1996-2000	185	21.14%
2001-2005	266	30.40%
2006-2010	155	17.71%
2011-2013	19	2.17%
Blank	2	0.23%

Table 5: Year Mission Started Interview Results

Mission Groups	Respondents	Percent
Pre-1960	2	2.44%
1960-1965	1	1.22%
1966-1970	1	1.22%
1971-1975	4	4.88%
1976-1980	3	3.66%
1981-1985	3	3.66%
1986-1990	5	6.10%
1991-1995	8	9.76%
1996-2000	12	14.63%
2001-2005	25	30.49%
2006-2010	14	17.07%
2011-2013	4	4.88%
Blank	0	0.00%

Table 6: Challenges Survey Results

	Mission President	Percent	Other Mission Leaders	Percent	Companions	Percent	Yourselves	Percent	Blank	Percent
Challenge 1	51	5.83%	68	7.77%	307	35.09%	278	31.77%	18	2.06%
Challenge 2	44	5.03%	141	16.11%	263	30.06%	166	18.97%	18	2.06%
Challenge 3	70	8.00%	171	19.54%	139	15.89%	155	17.71%	18	2.06%
Challenge 4	111	12.69%	148	16.91%	75	8.57%	97	11.09%	18	2.06%
Challenge 5	107	12.23%	102	11.66%	31	3.54%	65	7.43%	18	2.06%
Challenge 6	105	12.00%	97	11.09%	26	2.97%	30	3.43%	18	2.06%
Challenge 7	129	14.74%	101	11.54%	14	1.60%	31	3.54%	18	2.06%
Challenge 8	240	27.43%	29	3.31%	2	0.23%	35	4.00%	18	2.06%
	Food	Percent	Language	Percent	Culture	Percent	People	Percent		
	10	1.14%	108	12.34%	18	2.06%	17	1.94%		
	23	2.63%	122	13.94%	38	4.34%	60	6.86%		
	48	5.49%	78	8.91%	105	12.00%	91	10.40%		
	64	7.31%	77	8.80%	143	16.34%	142	16.23%		
	126	14.40%	99	11.31%	153	17.49%	174	19.89%		
	158	18.06%	74	8.46%	203	23.20%	164	18.74%		
	210	24.00%	105	12.00%	153	17.49%	114	13.03%		
	218	24.91%	194	22.17%	44	5.03%	95	10.86%		

Table 7: Challenges Interview Results

	Mission President	Percent	Other Mission Leaders	Percent	Companions	Percent	Yourselves	Percent	Blank	Percent
Challenge 1	3	3.66%	6	7.32%	13	15.85%	13	15.85%	27	32.93%
Challenge 2	3	3.66%	9	10.98%	20	24.39%	19	23.17%	13	15.85%
Challenge 3	4	4.88%	2	2.44%	31	37.80%	23	28.05%	5	6.10%
	Food	Percent	Language	Percent	Culture	Percent	People	Percent		
	1	1.22%	8	9.76%	5	6.10%	6	7.32%		
	2	2.44%	10	12.20%	3	3.66%	3	3.66%		
	0	0.00%	12	14.63%	2	2.44%	3	3.66%		

Table 8: Survey Results by Ethnicity

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	6	0.69%
Hispanic	26	2.97%
White	821	93.83%
Asian	9	1.03%
Black or African American	5	0.57%
American Indian or Alaska Native	6	0.69%
Blank	2	0.23%

Table 9: Interview Results by Ethnicity

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
Hispanic	4	4.88%
White	77	93.90%
Asian	0	0.00%
Black or African American	0	0.00%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1.22%

Table 10: Survey Results by Sex

Male	657	75.09%
Female	213	24.34%
Blank	5	0.57%

Table 11: Interview Results by Sex

Male	74	90.24%
Female	8	9.76%

Table 12: More Difficult Adjustment Survey Results

Mormon missionary culture	681	78.10%
Culture of mission area	182	20.87%
Blank	12	1.38%

Table 13: More Difficult Adjustment Interview Results

Mormon missionary culture	44	53.66%
Culture of mission area	28	34.15%
Blank	4	4.88%
Neither	4	4.88%
Both	2	2.44%

Table 14: Country of Origin Survey Results

Country of Origin	Respondents	Percent
Argentina	2	0.23%
Australia	4	0.46%
Burundi	1	0.11%
Canada	15	1.71%
Cape Verde	1	0.11%
Chile	4	0.46%
China	1	0.11%
El Salvador	1	0.11%
France	3	0.34%
Germany	7	0.80%
Guatemala	1	0.11%
Hungary	1	0.11%
Malaysia	2	0.23%
Mexico	2	0.23%
New Zealand	6	0.69%
Philippines	1	0.11%
South Africa	2	0.23%
Sweden	1	0.11%
Taiwan	2	0.23%
Uganda	1	0.11%
United Kingdom	6	0.69%
United States of America	807	92.23%
Uruguay	1	0.11%
Venezuela	1	0.11%
Blank	2	0.23%

Table 15: Country of Origin Interview Results

Country of Origin	Respondents	Percent
United States	82	100.00%

Table 16: Country of Service Survey Results

Country of Service	Respondents	Percent
Albania	1	0.11%
Argentina	42	4.80%
Australia	20	2.29%
Austria	3	0.34%
Bahamas	1	0.11%
Belgium	4	0.46%
Bolivia	9	1.03%
Brazil	53	6.06%
Bulgaria	5	0.57%
Canada	27	3.09%
Chile	12	1.37%
China	21	2.40%
Colombia	4	0.46%
Costa Rica	1	0.11%
Czech Republic	2	0.23%
Demark	2	0.23%
Dominican Republic	5	0.57%
Ecuador	11	1.26%
Estonia	3	0.34%
Fiji	3	0.34%
Finland	4	0.46%
France	16	1.83%
Germany	29	3.31%
Greece	3	0.34%
Guatemala	7	0.80%
Guyana	1	0.11%
Haiti	2	0.23%
Honduras	4	0.46%
Hungary	6	0.69%
India	1	0.11%
Ireland	3	0.34%
Italy	14	1.60%
Jamaica	1	0.11%
Japan	35	4.00%
Kenya	1	0.11%

Table 16: Continued

Country of Service	Respondents	Percent
Lithuania	1	0.11%
Luxembourg	1	0.11%
Madagascar	2	0.23%
Malaysia	2	0.23%
Mauritius	1	0.11%
Mexico	19	2.17%
Micronesia/Guam	1	0.11%
Mongolia	1	0.11%
Netherlands	6	0.69%
New Zealand	2	0.23%
Nicaragua	1	0.11%
Norway	2	0.23%
Paraguay	3	0.34%
Peru	7	0.80%
Philippines	9	1.03%
Poland	2	0.23%
Portugal	7	0.80%
Romania	6	0.69%
Russia	13	1.49%
Samoa	1	0.11%
Singapore	4	0.46%
South Africa	8	0.91%
South Korea	9	1.03%
Spain	15	1.71%
Sweden	1	0.11%
Switzerland	21	2.40%
Taiwan	14	1.60%
Thailand	6	0.69%
Trinidad and Tobago	1	0.11%
Ukraine	6	0.69%
United Kingdom	17	1.94%
United States of America	306	34.97%
Uruguay	13	1.49%
Venezuela	8	0.91%
Zambia	1	0.11%
Zimbabwe	2	0.23%

Table 17: Country of Service Interview Results

Country of Service	Respondents	Percent
Albania	1	1.22%
Argentina	5	6.10%
Australia	1	1.22%
Brazil	4	4.88%
Canada	3	3.66%
Caribbean	1	1.22%
Chile	3	3.66%
China	1	1.22%
El Salvador	1	1.22%
England	1	1.22%
France	1	1.22%
Germany	5	6.10%
Guam/Palau	1	1.22%
Honduras	1	1.22%
Italy	3	3.66%
Japan	3	3.66%
Mexico	4	4.88%
Puerto Rico/Barbados	2	2.44%
Romania	2	2.44%
Russia	3	3.66%
South Korea	4	4.88%
Spain	1	1.22%
Taiwan	3	3.66%
Thailand	1	1.22%
United States	26	31.71%
Venezuela	1	1.22%

Table 18: Culture of Service Survey Results

Non-Native Culture	577	65.94%
Native Culture	297	33.94%
Blank	1	0.11%

Table 19: Culture of Service Interview Results

Non-Native Culture	57	69.51%
Native Culture	25	30.49%

Table 20: Mormon Mission Leadership Structure

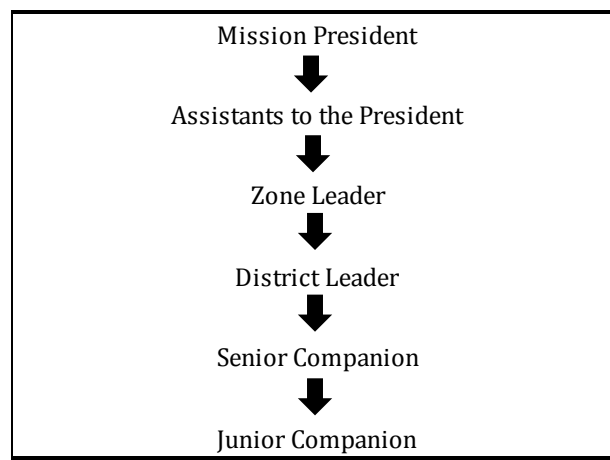


Table 21: Most Influential Individual Survey Results

	Mission President	Percent	Trainer/First Companion	Percent	Second Companion	Percent	Blank	Percent
Influence 1	198	22.63%	293	33.49%	123	14.06%	14	1.60%
Influence 2	163	18.63%	236	26.97%	142	16.23%	14	1.60%
Influence 3	156	17.83%	119	13.60%	186	21.26%	14	1.60%
Influence 4	137	15.66%	96	10.97%	167	19.09%	14	1.60%
Influence 5	127	14.51%	65	7.43%	151	17.26%	14	1.60%
Influence 6	80	9.14%	52	5.94%	92	10.51%	14	1.60%
	District/Zone Leader	Percent	MTC Teacher	Percent	Native Companion	Percent		
	36	4.11%	81	9.26%	130	14.86%		
	97	11.09%	100	11.43%	123	14.06%		
	177	20.23%	116	13.26%	107	12.23%		
	211	24.11%	155	17.71%	95	10.86%		
	210	24.00%	202	23.09%	106	12.11%		
	130	14.86%	207	23.66%	300	34.29%		

Table 22: Most Influential Individual Interview Results

	Mission President	Percent	Trainer/First Companion	Percent	Second Companion	Percent	Blank	Percent
Influence 1	28	34.15%	28	34.15%	7	8.54%	1	0.11%
Influence 2	22	26.83%	10	12.20%	11	13.41%	10	1.14%
Influence 3	5	6.10%	13	15.85%	13	15.85%	22	2.51%
Influence 4	7	8.54%	7	8.54%	14	17.07%	28	3.20%
Influence 5	6	7.32%	4	4.88%	11	13.41%	29	3.31%
Influence 6	4	4.88%	1	1.22%	3	3.66%	30	3.43%
	District/Zone Leader	Percent	MTC Teacher	Percent	Native Companion	Percent		
	3	3.66%	8	9.76%	7	8.54%		
	8	9.76%	9	10.98%	12	14.63%		
	13	15.85%	12	14.63%	4	4.88%		
	11	13.41%	11	13.41%	4	4.88%		
	14	17.07%	15	18.29%	3	3.66%		
	3	3.66%	9	10.98%	32	39.02%		

Table 23: Life Event Survey Results

Liminal Phase	62	7.09%
Self-Contained	288	32.91%
Initiation	118	13.49%
Rite of Passage	207	23.66%
None	197	22.51%
Blank	3	0.34%

Table 24: Life Event Interview Results

Liminal Phase	9	10.98%
Self-Contained	16	19.51%
Initiation	8	9.76%
Rite of Passage	28	34.15%
None	12	14.63%
Blank	5	6.10%
All	4	4.88%

APPENDIX C

CHI-SQUARE STATISTICAL OUTPUT

Results: Chi-Square test for variable Age and Survey Question 4

In this test, the ages of survey respondents were batched at five-year increments (1.00= 21-25, 2.00= 26-30, 3.00= 31-35, 4.00= 36-40, 5.00= 41-45, 6.00= 46-50, 7.00= 51+) and examined in relation to the possible choices for the most difficult challenges faced by Mormon missionaries. The cultural challenges were batched and tested as a single variable; mission variables were kept separate (1.00=Mission president, 2.00=Other mission leaders, 3.00=A companion, 4.00=Yourself, 5.00=The food, the people, the culture, the language).

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Agebin * challengebin	857	91.8%	77	8.2%	934	100.0%

Agebin * challengebin Crosstabulation

		challengebin					Total
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	
Agebin	1.00 Count	4	6	26	47	27	110
	Expected Count	6.5	8.7	39.4	35.7	19.6	110.0
	2.00 Count	14	21	83	72	41	231
	Expected Count	13.7	18.3	82.8	74.9	41.2	231.0
	3.00 Count	6	16	97	73	40	232
	Expected Count	13.8	18.4	83.1	75.3	41.4	232.0
	4.00 Count	6	10	33	33	17	99
	Expected Count	5.9	7.9	35.5	32.1	17.7	99.0
	5.00 Count	9	7	28	22	6	72
	Expected Count	4.3	5.7	25.8	23.4	12.9	72.0
	6.00 Count	3	3	11	11	11	39
	Expected Count	2.3	3.1	14.0	12.7	7.0	39.0
	7.00 Count	9	5	29	20	11	74
	Expected Count	4.4	5.9	26.5	24.0	13.2	74.0
Total	Count	51	68	307	278	153	857
	Expected Count	51.0	68.0	307.0	278.0	153.0	857.0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.230 ^a	24	.020
Likelihood Ratio	39.796	24	.022
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.758	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	857		

a. 4 cells (11.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.32.

Results: Chi-Square test for Alternative 1A and 1B

In this test, Alternate 1A: *Mormon missionaries serving in a culture that is native will actively see their mission president as the person most responsible for their missionary identity* and Alternate 1B: *Mormon missionaries serving in a culture that is non-native will actively see their trainer/first companion as the person most responsible for their missionary identity* were examined. The possible positions of influence (1.00= Mission president, 2.00= Trainer/first companion, 3.00= Second companion, 4.00= MTC teacher, 5.00= District/zone leader, 6.00= Native companion) were measured against missionary service in a native (1.00= Survey respondent's country of origin and country of service match) or non-native culture (.00= Survey respondent's country of origin and country of service do not match).

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Same * influence	859	92.0%	75	8.0%	934	100.0%

Same * influence Crosstabulation Count

		influence						Total
		1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	6.00	
Same	.00	118	179	75	63	25	118	578
	1.00	80	113	48	18	11	11	281
Total		198	292	123	81	36	129	859

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	50.708 ^a	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	59.226	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	42.655	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	859		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.78.

The remaining statistical tests that yielded no significant results are not reported.

APPENDIX D

GLOSSARY

Bishop – the ecclesiastical leader of a local Latter-day Saint congregation. The Bishop is the priesthood authority in his ward/congregation with jurisdiction of all persons, member or non-member, within the geographic boundaries of his ward.

Calling/called – a spiritual responsibility/assignment that comes from the Lord, through His appointed servants, to fulfill a specific task inside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Members fill the responsibilities voluntarily and move in, or out, of a calling through divine revelation.

Elders/Sisters – the common/honorific title for young men and young women who are called to serve as full-time missionaries; the proper title for all other adults in the Church are “brother” and “sister” respectively.

Endowments – one of the saving ordinances required to gain exaltation; the endowment is a sacred ordinance performed only in LDS temples with members of good standing. The endowment contains covenants that prepare Latter-day Saints to return to live with God again.

Investigators – any individual who is meeting with the missionaries, participating in missionary discussions, and is preparing for baptism as a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mission Call – a formal assignment issued by a living prophet to serve the Lord as a full-time missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; only members who have been found worthy to receive this responsibility, through adherence to the laws, commandments, and covenants of the Gospel, are allowed to serve as missionaries.

Missionary Lessons/Missionary Discussions – spiritual lessons covering topics of basic Latter-day Saints doctrine and theology; these lessons are taught by the full-time missionaries.

Set-apart – specific authority from God, given through His appointed servants, for an individual to work in an assigned job in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; when that assignment is fulfilled, or when the Lord sees fit, the individual is then “released” from their spiritual responsibility.

Seventy – A Priesthood office that existed in the Primitive Church and which carried the responsibility, along with the Twelve Disciples, to spread the Gospel. Today, this same position exists in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with similar responsibilities to teach the Gospel and aid in the global administration of the Church.

Stake/ward/branch – various divisions of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A stake is an administrative unit comprised of multiple wards and presided over by a local leader called a Stake President. A ward is an administrative unit comprised of multiple families within a specified geographic boundary; a ward is presided over by a local leader called a Bishop. A branch is an administrative unit without the necessary local members, or Melchizedek Priesthood brethren, to create a ward. It is presided over by a local leader called a branch president.

The Word of Wisdom – A revelation given to Joseph Smith in 1833 containing the basic health practices of Latter-day Saints. The Word of Wisdom forbids the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, tea, coffee, and illegal/prescription drugs; it also includes counsel to eat fruits and vegetables while eating meat sparingly.